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Illinois Issues

A publication of the University of Illinois at Springfield



Token support

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downstate systems plan
an alternate route

Illinois Issues

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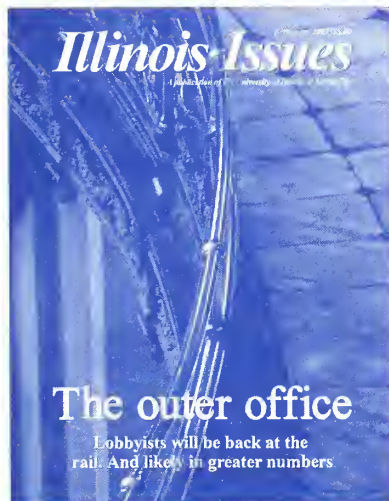


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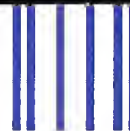
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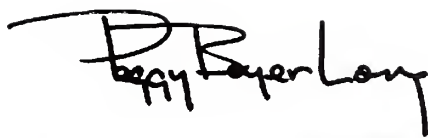


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It's been a privilege to work with so many thoughtful writerly types

by Peggy Boyer Long

When I began my tenure as editor of *Illinois Issues* a little more than 13 years ago, I sought advice from a few friends and former colleagues. What, I wanted to know, would they like to see the magazine become? What did they most want to see it accomplish?

The first person I called was Jim Krohe. Longtime readers will recognize his name, which has appeared at the top of articles, essays and reviews throughout the life of this magazine, three-plus decades and counting. But our professional paths first crossed at another publication. In the late 1970s, we shared space at a savvy little Springfield weekly called *Illinois Times*. I was a reporter covering state news, and he was just beginning to polish his well-suited persona as a curmudgeon with a column.

His advice during the call was delivered, in typical style, as a cranky directive: "Make the magazine more writerly," he said. And that was pretty much all he cared to say.

No matter. I knew what he meant. There's no good reason for a public policy magazine to deliver information in a monotone. Writers have different perspectives and wondrously varied "voices," as we say in this business, and editors owe readers the full range of

expression. As it turned out, editing these writers has been the best part about working at the magazine. It's what I'll miss most.

So allow me a few personal thoughts about them here at the end. It's a good time for reflection as I prepare to retire from the university and from the magazine. It's the last issue I'll edit, the last column I'll write. And what comes most to mind is just how challenging and rewarding, how much of a privilege really, it has been to work with so many thoughtful writerly types.

It was a good bargain. I gave them the space to have their say in the way they wanted to say it, and they repaid the rest of us. Journalism prof Charlie Wheeler, for instance, is a fact-driven reporter with a seasoned grounding in the Statehouse and a deep understanding of Illinois' political players, while history scholar Bob McGregor is a lyrical essayist with a wide-ranging intellect. This magazine gladly made room for both — to the readers' benefit.

What readers don't see, of course, are the calculated risks editors take. With McGregor, as with many of the other essayists, I adopted a wait-and-see approach on the direction of a piece, then negotiated the details. An essay is a personal creative endeavor, after all.

But I'm sure McGregor will remember, as I do, the day we both realized we were no longer engaged in (mostly) good-natured but (often) noisy head butting over some of his language. We wondered about this. Perhaps he had simply given up. Perhaps I had gone soft. More likely, we had settled naturally into a comfortable routine, as though slipping into familiar old shoes that once pinched smartly.

I've been fortunate throughout. I've worked with experienced Statehouse reporters, including Dan Vock, who still writes for us from the nation's capital, and talented young reporters who came through our own Statehouse bureau, including our current bureau chief, Bethany Jaeger.

I've been sad and proud to watch some of our chiefs move on, most recently Pat Guinane, a whip-smart journalist who still writes for us from Indiana, and Aaron Chambers, a high-wattage reporter and larger-than-life personality who still writes for us from the bureau of the Rockford newspaper.

I've been honored, too, to work with other top-tier talent, including *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist Mark Brown, who wrote some of the magazine's finest political profiles, Bill Lambrecht of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, who deftly

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gave our environmental reportage a sharper edge, and John Wesley Fountain, who wrote a rare-for-us, first-person essay on poverty.

I learned, mostly, to be open to chance, or willing to leverage it by playing our writers in various positions — encouraging a beat reporter to tackle a book review, say, or a scholar to do some reporting.

Editors are trained to work mostly with ideas and words. And I don't want to minimize that. But we soon learn better. In reality, we work mostly with people. Talented, opinionated and, yes, often outright quirky people. Leeway must be given. Sometimes lots of leeway must be given. The key is to learn when to push and when to punt.

In sum, editing is a series of hard-won discoveries: Which writers will want help finding the heart of the story, and who will lose momentum with too much talk. Which writers always run past deadline, and who is worth the wait.

I believe during my tenure here, we broadened the understanding of politics and governance. We launched

an arts issue, for example, then an environmental issue. We widened the frame to encompass all regions. And we covered a greater range of issues reflecting our state's rapidly diversifying population. But mostly, I tried to follow Krohe's advice.

He might be amused to hear that the piece generating the most response in these years was his essay on the possibility of cougars moving back to Illinois. We suggested readers let us know if they've spotted one, and sure enough plenty have and do. The essay was written in 2004, and we're still getting notified by e-mail. The latest cougar sighting came in September. The big cat had made it to Carlinville.

"Nostalgia?" Krohe asked in his essay. "Not quite. But the prospect of meeting a dangerous wild animal makes us momentarily alive again in a way our pampered existence seldom requires. That alone may be reason enough to welcome them back to Illinois."

Now that's writerly. □

Peggy Boyer Long can be reached at peggyboy@aol.com.

Three named Honors for public service

Rodger A. Heaton, Vicki Thomas and Thomas J. Wagner are the 2007 inductees into the Samuel K. Gove Illinois Legislative Internship Hall of Fame.

Illinois Issues and the University of Illinois at Springfield's Center for State Policy and Leadership sponsor the Hall, which is named for Sam Gove, one of the magazine's founders and a longtime director of the internship program. Members of the Hall were interns for one of the legislative leaders or for the Legislative Research Unit and have gone on to outstanding careers in public service. They're honored at a ceremony in the Executive Mansion.

Rodger A. Heaton has been U.S. attorney for the central district of Illinois since 2006. He also has worked as a litigation partner in private practice in Chicago. He was an intern in the class of 1981-82.

Vicki Thomas is executive director of the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules for the Illinois General Assembly and has been in that position since 1991. She was a member of the Senate Democratic staff from 1973 to 1978 and served as substantive staff director from 1978 to 1991. She was an intern in the class of 1972-73, the first to place women interns in the state Senate.

Thomas J. Wagner is the retired senior vice president and general counsel of CIGNA Corp. In 1967, he became counsel and administrative assistant to state Treasurer Adlai Stevenson III. When Stevenson was elected to the U.S. Senate, Wagner continued as his administrative assistant. Wagner left government service for private industry in 1978. He was a legislative intern in the class of 1962-63.

The Hall was established in 1990. It now includes 44 individuals, among them a former governor, several former and current state legislators, and legislative and executive staff members. □

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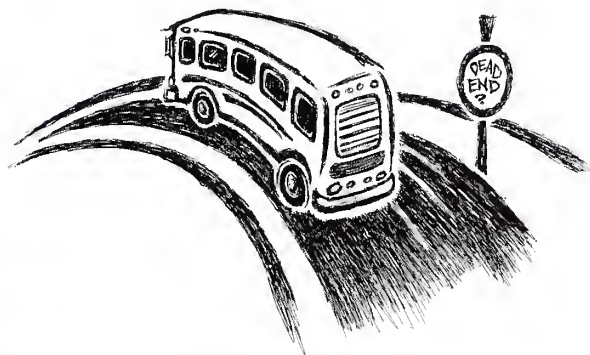
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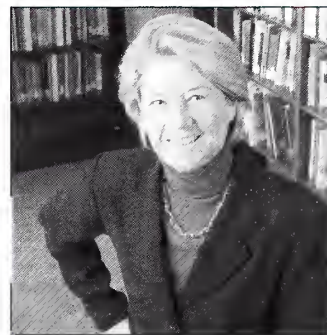
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Credits: Kathleen Riley Young illustrated this month's cover and our cover story inside. The issue was designed by Diana L. C. Nelson.

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Bethany Jaeger



Cook County's property tax system is unique and is likely to stay that way

by Bethany Jaeger

Despite paying for such essential services as ambulances, libraries, pensions for police and firefighters and, most of all, public schools, the property tax is often described as the tax most homeowners love to hate.

But if Illinoisans believe the debate in Springfield over property tax relief affects everyone equally, they would be wrong. Other than standardizing assessments of wind farms statewide, legislation approved by lawmakers to continue capping assessments will help residents of Cook County only. Further, critics charge the program is unfair to residents of the rest of the state. This is because the Cook County property tax system is unique.

First, political pressure is more direct in Cook County. The assessor is elected. Some township assessors and supervisors of assessments in other counties also are elected, but most are appointed by county boards, according to the Illinois Department of Revenue. And Charlie Wheeler, the director of the Public Affairs Reporting Program at the University of Illinois at Springfield, says because Cook County assessors have always been elected, "It became common practice to give homeowners breaks in terms of evaluating their property."

Wheeler was a reporter for the *Chicago Sun-Times* at the time of the 1969-1970 constitutional convention when Chicago got its unique local tax

Property tax decisions made in Cook County since the 1970s have favored homeowners, read voters, leaving businesses to foot the rest of the bill.

system. Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley won an amendment to the state charter allowing Cook County to tax commercial and industrial properties at higher rates than residential properties. The system employs more than a dozen classes.

No other counties use classification. Instead, they assess all taxable property at about 33 and one-third percent of fair market value, which is the amount it would sell for on the open market.

Now Chicago-area homeowners stand to gain another advantage. Lawmakers agreed to allow Cook County to continue offering exemptions to homeowners. This so-called 7 percent solution, first approved three years ago, was designed to combat rapidly rising assessments on residential properties in that region.

In a Senate committee last month, Democratic Sen. Iris Martinez said the property taxes for her Chicago condo have shot up so high that her taxes are almost as much as her mortgage.

But property taxes are a zero-sum

game, says Tom Johnson, executive director of the Taxpayers' Federation of Illinois. Local governments request a set amount of revenue they'll need to cover public services then levy that amount against the total value of property within the county. When one type of property gets a break, the rates have to be adjusted on others to make up the difference.

Property tax decisions made in Cook County since the 1970s have favored homeowners, read voters, leaving businesses to foot the rest of the bill. Exemptions exacerbate that inequity.

"The de facto classification evolved over time as local elected lawmakers were trying to curry favor with their residential voters," Wheeler says. "And the 7 percent [assessment cap] is a reflection of the same desire to help individual voters who are faced with the prospect of rapidly escalating property values."

He adds that it's the same mentality that led to "tax caps," a version of property tax limits enacted in 1991. Tax caps now are required in Cook County and its five neighboring counties. About half of the other counties across Illinois also use them. They limit the rates set by schools or other local taxing districts by capping the annual increase at 5 percent or the rate of inflation, whichever is less, unless voters approve a higher amount.

Johnson says the law is "the best thing we did in the property tax system in the

last 15 years” because it engenders accountability.

Regardless of intent or effect, once a county establishes tax policy, it’s difficult to change for the simple reason that homeowners who once got tax breaks can turn into angry voters if they no longer do.

In Cook County, the policy is to assess residential land at 16 percent of fair market value, while commercial parcels are assessed at 38 percent. The county is split into three regions for tax purposes: the city of Chicago, the north suburbs and the south suburbs. Each region is reassessed in a three-year cycle.

Starting around 2000, assessments of residential properties began shooting through the roof. County data show that they increased between 35 percent in the city and more than 70 percent in the south and west townships. Political pressure to do something trickled down from the Chicago area to Springfield, where lawmakers were convinced to cap the taxable amount of homeowners’ assessed valuations. The solution, designed by Cook County Assessor James Houlihan, offered property tax exemptions to homeowners in that county for three years.

The Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce says businesses absorbed a higher tax burden as a result and gained one more reason to move elsewhere. Joan Parker, a consultant for the chamber, told a Senate committee last month, “Over \$300 million has been shifted onto the business community. We believe that continuing this law will continue [the] shift to businesses.”

Whether capping assessments works for homeowners, however, depends on whom you ask.

Houlihan says yes. A 2005 report by his office concludes that 95 percent of eligible residents in the city of Chicago received an exemption of more than \$4,500 for 2003, and nearly 80 percent of homeowners received a lower tax bill overall. In the second year of the program, the median tax bill rose by 1 percent. And about three-fourths of the city’s homeowners received exemptions worth more than \$5,000. In Chicago’s northern suburbs, more than half of the residents also had lower property tax bills when their exemptions started for 2004.

On the other hand, a 2006 study by

Regardless of intent or effect, once a county establishes tax policy, it’s difficult to change for the simple reason that homeowners who once got tax breaks can turn into angry voters if they no longer do.

the University of Illinois’ Institute of Government and Public Affairs concludes that while some homeowners saw significant benefits ranging from \$227 per taxable year in the south suburbs to \$415 in the north suburbs after the first year, other homeowners got higher bills because their tax rates were increased to compensate for total exemptions. In 2005, 65 percent of homeowners paid lower property tax bills, while 35 percent paid more than they would have without the assessment cap.

The effect on individual taxpayers and businesses varies. Homeowners in the city of Chicago whose properties lost value didn’t qualify for the tax break. They paid a total of \$30 million more in 2003, according to the report. Apartment owners paid \$14 million more. Commercial properties paid \$60 million more.

Johnson of the Taxpayers’ Federation says the system is unfair, was enacted at the wrong time and is difficult to correct.

“Certain people are winners, and others are losers,” he says. For instance, someone who lives in a home for years could get the full exemption. A neighbor who just bought a house next door with the same value could get nothing.

He adds that the prime time to make significant changes to property tax policy is during a stable real estate market for homes and for businesses. That’s not the case now and wasn’t when the measure was enacted in 2004, he says. “It was just the opposite.”

The current real estate market, however, is starting to stabilize, which just fuels the argument against extending the assessment cap when it would have expired in some areas of the county this year.

But Chicago-area residents found out

last month that they would be protected under the extension for three more years. After months of negotiations, the General Assembly approved extending the 7 percent solution, overriding Gov. Rod Blagojevich’s amendatory veto, which would have increased the exemptions and made the assessment cap permanent.

As it stands, the measure increases homeowners’ exemptions from a high of \$20,000 to up to \$33,000, phasing it out over the three years. The intent is to transition from the broad homeowners’ exemptions to a more targeted, long-term exemption for residents who need it most, says David Eldridge, legislative director of the Taxpayers’ Federation.

Blagojevich wants a homeowner’s exemption of up to \$40,000, which he says would cover at least 76 percent of Cook County residents.

That concerns the federation. “The fundamental question is, is it a good idea for 76 percent of Cook County to get this greater relief than the rest of the state gets, when there are other parts of the state that are paying higher taxes than Cook County is?” Eldridge asks.

Some Chicago Democrats agree with the governor’s intent to make the exemption permanent but question the constitutionality of using an amendatory veto to make the change. In order to prevent the program from ending just before primary election season in February, the House and Senate agreed to override the governor’s veto.

The governor is not accepting defeat, however. He said in a statement that if the General Assembly doesn’t come back to Springfield to raise the exemption and make it permanent, he’ll require lawmakers to return in a special session next month. Sen. Terry Link, a Waukegan Democrat who sponsored the approved measure, also said on the last day of the fall session that he will seek to make the 7 percent solution permanent through legislation.

Cook County likely will remain unique. Though the law allows any county in the state to adopt the assessment cap, Johnson says none will. Downstate counties, he says, don’t have enough of a business tax base to absorb the burden of tax breaks granted homeowners. □

Bethany Jaeger can be reached at capitolbureau@aol.com.

BRIEFLY

Photograph by Laura Barghusen, courtesy of Openlands Project

CLEAN WATER **Study assesses** **bacterial hazards** **in Chicago rivers**

Will playing in the water make you sick? Researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago will spend three years tracking boaters, fishermen and other recreational users of Chicago's rivers in an effort to find out.

"The purpose of this research is to help develop a microbial water quality standard to determine what are the risks," says Samuel Dorevitch, research assistant professor of environmental and occupational health sciences at UIC.

The study is funded by a \$3.75 million grant from the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago.

Dorevitch and his team will interview up to 9,000 people who use Chicago-area waterways, 78 miles of canals, streams and tributaries that include the Chicago River, the Cal-Sag Channel, the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and Lake Calumet. Participants will be categorized as those who come in contact with the water for such activities as fishing and boating — all recreation except swimming; those close to the water during such activities as walking or jogging; and those who play in and near Lake Michigan, a cleaner body of water.

Over a two-year period, the researchers will interview participants prior to and after water recreation, asking such questions as whether they swallowed any water. Then they'll follow up with phone calls, three times over a three-week period. "If someone becomes sick, we want to know about it," says Dorevitch.

He and his team will be particularly alert to intestinal illnesses, respiratory infections, skin conditions, eye infections and ear infections. A research nurse will



go to the home of anyone reporting an illness and take samples to identify the germs causing the illness. Biostatisticians will spend another year analyzing the data.

The study, which is the first in the nation for rivers, was prompted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's move to require the district to disinfect water going into the waterway system. Most major metropolitan wastewater systems treat their effluent with a chlorination/dechlorination process, ultraviolet radiation or ozone.

The district has not had any reports of illness, says General Superintendent Richard Lanyon. "We think we should have some good science before we cavalierly spend \$700 million of taxpayer money."

The district is a separate governing body from the city of Chicago or Cook County. Still, Mayor Richard Daley

called for disinfection of the waterway in his 2005 *Chicago River Agenda*.

The Alliance for the Great Lakes, a Chicago-based nonprofit, supports the push to designate the waterway as primary use, which would put it under the Clean Water Act definition of swimmable and fishable water. The group is calling on the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency to back that proposal before the Illinois Pollution Control Board.

The UIC study, along with other public comment, can be part of the judgment process once a complaint is filed with the board, says Doug Scott, director of the state environmental agency.

"Our main goal is to try to get the waterways in the position where they can be something more than just roadways for ships."

Beverley Scobell

For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>

LEGISLATIVE CHECKLIST

Ongoing feuds between the state's top Democrats prevented the Illinois General Assembly from adjourning its record overtime session by mid-October. The regular spring session rolled right into the annual fall session, and many large budget items remained unresolved at press time. Legislative leaders and rank-and-file lawmakers continue to debate ways to raise enough money for a capital plan. They'll also have to agree on whether that plan should finance road and school construction projects, increase education funding and subsidize the financially strapped mass transportation systems.

Meanwhile, lawmakers did take action on some measures.



Budget cuts

The House overwhelmingly voted to override most of the \$470 million in projects the governor cut out of the approved state budget. The Senate restored \$7.9 million that President Emil Jones Jr. says was inadvertently cut for such state offices as the attorney general and the Illinois courts. The Senate could vote to override more budget cuts or draft a supplemental budget later, says Sen. Donne Trotter, the budget negotiator.



Mass transit

Gov. Rod Blagojevich advanced the entire year's worth of state subsidies to the Regional Transportation Authority to prevent Chicago-area mass transit systems from laying off employees and reducing services. He says the \$37 million advance would buy more time for the legislature to come up with a long-term solution, but the RTA still says services would be cut if that doesn't happen.

One long-term transit funding plan narrowly failed in the House. The measure, sponsored by Democratic Rep. Julie Hamos of Evanston and supported by House Speaker Michael Madigan, would increase the sales tax in the Chicago region and allow the city to increase a real estate transfer tax.

The governor and the Senate president oppose Hamos' measure and devised a different, much larger revenue plan that would combine a capital program with education and mass transit funding. Three new casinos, including a land-based venue in Chicago, would generate the cash, but opponents, including Madigan and House Republican Leader Tom Cross, say three new casinos is too many.

Sen. Christine Radogno, a Lemont Republican, sided with the governor and credited him for opposing the sales tax increase, which she says is regressive and would unfairly apply to food and drugs. Instead, she favors a GOP idea to increase more transportation-related fees, such as those for driver's licenses and vehicle stickers.



Speed limits

A majority of the House agreed with the governor and rejected a measure that would have established a uniform speed limit of 65 miles per hour for all vehicles on rural highways, defined as four-lane highways separated by a median. The attempt to allow trucks to drive the same speed as cars has failed a handful of times before. The governor vetoed the measure last month, but the House didn't have enough votes to override his veto. The bill died as a result.



Moment of silence

Every Illinois school must observe a moment of silence to start each school day. The House and Senate overrode the governor and approved the measure last month. Previous law allowed but did not require teachers to observe the silence.

The governor vetoed the bill with the message, "I believe in the power of prayer. I also believe that our founding fathers wisely recognized the personal nature of faith and prayer, and that is why the separation of church and state is a centerpiece of our Constitution, our democracy and our freedoms."



Wine shipments

Wineries in Illinois can now ship a limited supply directly to consumers who are of legal age. This is a controversial change in state law, which was approved after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2005 that states must treat in-state and out-of-state wineries the same.

Starting July 1, 2008, Illinois will join some 30 states in allowing all wineries to ship limited amounts directly to customers, but the Illinois law also prohibits customers from buying wine through auctions or out-of-state retailers.

Under the measure signed by the governor last month, wineries will be able to buy a new type of state license and pay a sales tax and state excise tax per gallon of wine shipped within Illinois. They would be limited to shipping 12 cases of wine to a single customer each year and up to 5,000 gallons to such Illinois retailers as restaurants and stores. Distributors would have to get a signature from a person who is 21 years or older in order to deliver the package.



Mental health

A new state law aims to make it easier for families to commit a loved one who has a mental illness to an institution if the person won't seek treatment but is expected to or threatens to engage in "dangerous conduct."

Courts can consider the person's past behavior when deciding whether there is a "reasonable expectation" that the person could endanger others.



Eye exams

In January, all children entering public or private school in Illinois for the first time must prove they received eye exams before October 15 of that school year, or their report cards will be withheld. Children can receive a waiver if they prove an "undue burden or lack of access" to an eye doctor. Existing law already requires routine immunizations and dental exams before kindergarten, second and sixth grades. *Bethany Jaeger*

CLEAN AIR

Task force pushes efficiency to limit greenhouse gases

A panel of experts spent most of this year studying ways Illinois can limit greenhouse gas emissions — the main reason, most scientists report, for the increased warming of the planet. They planned to give their recommendations to the governor at the end of October.

The Illinois Climate Change Advisory Group settled on 24 strategies that, when taken together, could reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions. If the state were to do nothing, the emissions would equal 312 million metric tons by 2020. Under the plan, the level would be reduced by 81 million metric tons, which would put it at 1990 levels.

Among the panel's recommendations are more fuel-efficient vehicles, expansion of mass transit, energy efficiency in residential and commercial construction, incentives for renewables and energy efficiency standards for appliances, equipment and light bulbs.

A more controversial strategy is the institution of a cap-and-trade program for power plants and other high-carbon emitters. Under such a regulation, companies that invest in cleaner emissions technology and stay below standards could earn and sell credits to those that continue to pollute the air, as long as all emitters stay under a designated cap. Panelists who object to this strategy prefer it over a tax, such as the one under discussion in the U.S. Senate, but think the initiative should be implemented at the federal level, says Doug Scott, director of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and panel chairman.

"A lot of the other proposals could be implemented in Illinois only," says Scott. "With cap-and-trade, it does make sense to do it on the broadest possible level."

Scott says Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin are in various stages of setting up programs to reduce emissions. A regional consortium would be possible, or the state could link to already established programs with northeastern or western states.

Meanwhile, Illinois has joined the Climate Registry, a group of more than 38 states and some Canadian provinces that support a common measuring and reporting system for greenhouse gas emissions.

Though several proposals pending in Congress offer programs to combat greenhouse gas emissions, most analysts don't see real movement on the issue happening until 2009, after the presidential election. Yet, a similar cap-and-trade program to reduce sulfur dioxide emissions in the 1990s was successful. Emissions were reduced below expectations for less cost to power companies than predicted.

Beverley Scobell

Photograph courtesy of the Texas Traffic Institute



Chicagoans spend more time and money on commutes

How many hours of your life are you wasting while sitting in traffic? A lot, concludes a new study by the Texas Transportation Institute based at Texas A&M University in College Station.

The Urban Mobility Report calculates how much time, money and energy is lost in 85 of the nation's biggest metropolitan cities and compares the shift from 1982 to 2005.

How do Chicagoans fare? With a 2005 national total of 4.2 billion hours lost to traffic each year, Chicago commuters spend more than 202 million hours stuck in traffic. Each Chicago driver uses at least 46 of those hours and dishes out \$906 a year because of congested roadways. Nationally, drivers spend more than \$78 billion and waste almost 3 billion gallons of gas, enough to fill 58 fully loaded supertankers, according to the institute.

The problems have been getting worse. In just 10 years, Chicago travel expenses have almost doubled, from about \$500 in 1995 to nearly \$1,000 in 2005. And Chicago commuters wasted 87 million hours more in traffic than they did in 1995.

Public transportation makes a difference. "If all the trips made by transit in 2005 were made on the roads, delay would have been 40 million hours higher," says Tim Lomax, a research engineer for the institute.

In fact, the Illinois Department of Transportation is working with the Chicago-area Regional Transportation Authority on several campaigns to increase mass transit use. The department also has several projects under way to decrease congestion and increase safety. "When you have excessive congestion, it leads to more crashes," says Mike Claffey, a department spokesman.

City planners are reviewing some options, too, one of which is congestion pricing, a system similar to tolls. In certain areas, motorists would be charged a fee to drive on the roads. The price would fluctuate, rising during peak travel times.

Bonnie Burcham

Student athletics association studies drug test rules

Each year the Illinois High School Association fields calls from athletes, parents and even schools about whether students are allowed to take drugs or substances to enhance performance.

"Our answer right now is that it's not right, healthy or safe, but they aren't violating any rules," says Kurt Gibson, assistant executive director of the association. "We decided we need to be more proactive about this and provide leadership to schools instead of waiting for something bad to happen."

Those phone calls have prompted the association to put together a drug testing proposal that will be presented to principals across the state this fall. The organization will be looking for feedback on whether to create a random drug testing program for athletes who compete in state tournaments. The list of banned substances would be modeled after the National Collegiate Athletic Association's policy, and students would be required to consent to tests before they could participate in state tournaments.

Gibson expects most discussion to be about consequences for positive tests and who will pay for the testing. Penalties could affect schools and students. "Say the star quarterback of a state championship team tests positive for steroids," Gibson says. "Do we allow that school to keep the championship?"

Following the meetings, a nonbinding survey on the plan will allow member schools to say whether they support a testing program. Then, the association's board will discuss the issue in January or February of next year.

While the association's program would affect students statewide, few are tested for drugs now. Officials at schools that test say they are in the minority, but it's unclear how many schools have programs because no one tracks the practice.

Two private Catholic schools in Illinois — St. Patrick High School in Chicago and St. Viator Catholic High School in Arlington Heights — test all students at the beginning of the year and continue random tests after that. School officials report a handful of students test positive.

Other schools, such as Pineknobville

Community High School in southern Illinois, test athletes on a random basis. Officials at the three schools say their testing programs give students a good reason to say no to drugs.

Tests use hair or urine and can be changed to test for different types of drugs.

Consequences vary. Students at the Catholic schools face expulsion after a second positive test, while Pineknobville athletes lose a percentage of their season play with any positive test. A third positive test at Pineknobville results in a student losing the right to play the sport for the remainder of high school.

"The whole concept of this is that it helps kids in two ways. It helps get peer pressure off their backs and offers them help if they do test positive," says Brother Konrad Diebold, president of St. Patrick's.

Diebold says drug dealers now stay away from the school and his students. And he can confidently say his school is drug free. "In today's world, that is incredible."

Kristy Kennedy



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QUOTABLES

“If you can’t come together on procedural issues, how in the world can you hope to resolve the serious issues that confront the people of the state of Illinois?”

Circuit Court Judge Patrick Kelley admonished the legal teams for Gov. Rod Blagojevich and House Speaker Michael Madigan after the governor sued House Clerk Mark Mahoney to require him to file the governor’s budget veto messages in the record September 4. That was the first day the House met for regular session after the governor’s budget cuts. Kelley called the lawsuit an example of the “ridiculous and embarrassing Hatfield and McCoy atmosphere at the Statehouse” and dismissed the case because the House filed the governor’s veto messages three days before the court hearing.

“I think they should be more honest with people.”

U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin told Gatehouse News Service last month that he cautioned the governor and the state’s legislative leaders against relying on gaming expansions or the sale of state assets to pay for new programs or mass transit subsidies. He added, “Selling off state assets and building casinos will only take you so far.”

Families’ net worth questioned in study

There’s room for improvement in the average Illinois family’s net worth, according to the 2007-2008 *Assets and Opportunity Scorecard* released by the Corporation for Enterprise Development.

“The data for Illinois suggest that, in general, the state’s residents are struggling to gain an economic foothold and build the assets necessary to achieve financial security,” the Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit concludes.

The scorecard, which measures assets and net worth in all states and the District of Columbia, looked at five categories: financial security, business development, homeownership, health care and education. Each category has several subcategories that are ranked on a scale of one to 51. Ranking No. 1 is most desirable.

Illinois received a middling grade overall. Too little small business ownership and homeownership and too much asset poverty drove down the score.

Illinois is ranked 40th overall in small business ownership. However, within this category there are some promising numbers. Illinois ranks 5th in the value of women-owned businesses and in the top 14 for minority-owned businesses. The state also ranks high (15th) for availability of private loans to small businesses.

Illinois flunked homeownership, ranking 36th on affordability and 40th for the rate of foreclosures. The study noted that Illinois has recently added programs to encourage homeownership, two of which are the G-I Loan for Heroes and Assets Illinois. The state also expanded the I-Loan Mortgage Program, which provides below-market interest rates to qualified first-time buyers.

The group suggested a solution for some of the state’s low rankings. By offering children’s savings accounts, the state can help parents prepare for their children’s financial future. These accounts, which could be set up for every child at birth, are generally regarded as custodial bank accounts to which the state may provide matching dollars.

Dory Rand, the supervising attorney for the community investment unit of the Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty Law in Chicago, says such savings accounts could reduce future personal debt, while providing funding for education, housing, transportation or any other asset the child might need.

Illinois does offer a college fund, called Illinois Bright Start, which is an investment account that remains tax free as long as it is used for higher education. The account doesn’t offer matching funds.

“[Children’s savings accounts] would teach the next generation better saving habits. Also, because every child would have one, it could be used as a learning tool for the classroom,” Rand says. “Math could be explained by using their accounts as examples and by the time the children are old enough to buy cars or homes, they will know about compound interest and other valuable financial ideas.”

In a printed statement, Corporation for Enterprise Development President Andrea Levere said, “States can foster an environment of opportunity, inspiring more residents to plan for a more secure future.”

Bonnie Burcham

An Illinois scorecard

Financial security	C
Business development	B
Homeownership	F
Health care	C
Education	B

SOURCE: *The Corporation for Enterprise Development*

IMMIGRATION

Feds sue Illinois over state law

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security sued Illinois over a state law that prohibits employers from using the federal government's online system for checking the legal status of employees. The agency filed the suit in Springfield and argued federal law should preempt state law.

The national program, now called E-Verify, allows employers to type new employees' information into federal databases to verify their Social Security numbers and ensure they can work legally in the United States.

Illinois is one of six states that participated in the federal pilot project, which rolled into a nationwide program two years ago. The feds say 800 Illinois businesses voluntarily registered.

The Illinois law, signed in August by Gov. Rod Blagojevich, suggests the system is inaccurate most of the time and prohibits employers from using it until Homeland Security and the Social Security Administration databases can confirm 99 percent of the cases without incidence.

Currently, the system verifies the employers' queries within seven seconds 90 percent of the time, says Chris Bentley, press secretary for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, which administers the program. For the remaining 10 percent of cases, the system doesn't have enough information to electronically verify identity and work status, so the agencies must pull documents manually. When that happens, federal law requires the case to be cleared up within 10 days. Illinois law, however, only allows three days.

Bentley says there's no way to meet the three-day deadline. "It's contrary to how the program runs. The program runs by allowing employees to have seven days to submit additional evidence."

According to the transcripts of a September press conference in Washington, D.C., Emilio Gonzalez, director of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, said the lawsuit was not about whether the agency could meet the 99 percent accuracy standard set in Illinois law. It's about giving businesses a tool to comply with the law.

"It's very inconsistent for us to go out and do something like this to help businesses help themselves," he said. "And then you

have state governments that are getting in the way. You can't have it both ways. You either want us to enforce the law, or you don't want us to enforce the law."

An independent 2006 report commissioned by the U.S. agency concluded accuracy of the system has improved since 1997, but noted the system's "unacceptably high rate" of failure to electronically verify information for foreign-born U.S. citizens. That would have to be rectified before E-Verify could become a mandated national program as intended, the report shows.

While businesses using E-Verify report that they find the program helpful, the Illinois Chamber of Commerce still supports the Illinois law.

"We were wanting to send the message that the system needs to be more accurate because, when it's not accurate, it creates more problems and headaches for employers that use the system. It's not that we don't want the system in place," says Jay Shattuck, head of the chamber's Employment Law Center. Rather, he says, a tool to verify identity helps employers ensure that they're hiring legal workers. "But it's got to have a reasonable amount of accuracy."

Bethany Jaeger

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Community college students score with new foundation

In a year when acrimony was high in Springfield, the Illinois Education Foundation managed to garner enough support to secure \$250,000 in state funding.

The nonprofit foundation will use those dollars to help students overcome social and monetary hurdles so they can succeed in community colleges — and beyond. Besides providing financial support, the agency offers tutoring services, links students with mentors and tries to educate them on such ethereal but essential concepts as networking, Executive Director Katonja Webb says. Providing tuition money alone might not be enough for some students who want to pursue higher education but face such challenges as juggling single parenthood with classes, she says.

By providing what Webb calls “last-dollar” support, the foundation tries to cut through potential obstacles. “Anything that financial aid won’t cover, we try to meet. That means paying no tuition, no fees. We provide stipends on a sliding scale. For some students that means \$100 to \$200 a semester. Some might get as much as \$750 — there are students [who] are raising kids of their own and need diapers to be able to go to school.”

Rashida Cooper, one of 67 foundation scholarship recipients, started out at Malcolm X Community College in Chicago and now is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in marketing at Northern Illinois

University in DeKalb. “At the time that I first got it, I was in financial need — I didn’t have a place to stay,” says Cooper, whose children were 3 and 6 at the time. “They even helped me pay for child care. I was able to focus on school.”

State Rep. David Miller, a Lynwood Democrat, says the program’s mission helped cut through partisan bickering.

The foundation’s legislative success also can be attributed to politically savvy founders who assembled a powerful advisory board, which includes Gov. Rod Blagojevich, several members of Congress, Illinois House Republican Leader Tom Cross and Democratic state Rep. Edward Acevedo of Chicago.

The foundation, which wants to move toward a public-private model for funding, also can point to tangible results. Over the past four semesters, its scholars have re-enrolled at a rate of 78 percent. Students must maintain a minimum C+ average to get their scholarship renewed.

Recently, the foundation proposed combining funding from Aetna, the insurance giant, with money from the Illinois Student Assistance Commission. The commission committed \$28,000 to this program, and Aetna has pledged \$36,500.

Cooper, who worked as a bill collector before receiving a foundation scholarship, says she doesn’t know how she could have arrived where she is without it. “I get one-on-one support. I don’t have to worry about paying for textbooks. The help I’m getting is different from what I see other students on campus getting.” *Jennifer Halperin*

Find of the century

Illinois archaeologists are working to preserve what they call the find of the century: an intact bottom of a flatboat. Found on the banks of the Ohio River, the 200-year-old piece is suffering degeneration from fluctuating water levels.

“Soaked wood doesn’t rot, so if previously wet wood is allowed to dry out, it is destroyed very quickly,” says Robert Swenson, an architecture professor at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

In 2002, when the boat was found, Swenson and SIUC archaeologist Mark Wagner mapped and photographed the boat before ensuring its safety from further decay. This summer, however, their protective measures had to be updated because part of the boat, named *America*, broke away and became lodged in the wreckage. This breakage was most likely caused by river traffic, which pulls at the remains.

As soon as they were alerted to the break, Swenson and Wagner assembled a team and secured emergency funding from the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois. The team dug a trench and placed timber around the broken gunwale to stabilize it, says Wagner.

The preservation is important because this is the only discovery of a flatboat remnant. Flatboats date from about 1800 to 1830. This is a rare find because the design of flatboats and the difficulty of controlling them meant they were only good in down-river journeys. Once the journey was complete, the boat was dismantled and sold as part of the cargo.

“Literally hundreds of thousands of boats were made during this time period, but the only way one could be found would be to stumble upon wreckage,” Wagner says.

Photograph by Robert Swenson



Mark Wagner with the remains of the flatboat America

The next step is to remove the boat from the river. However, this is a tricky process. “Since the boat has been submerged for close to 200 years, simply taking it out of the water will make it warp, crack and split,” Wagner says.

Polyethylene glycol is commonly used to replace the water in the cellulose of the wood.

The goal is to obtain funding to begin the expensive drying process and eventually place the boat in a museum. Though the boat isn’t whole, it’s a big enough artifact that exhibitors can ghost out or reconstruct it with new materials that contrast the original lumber. This process would show observers the original magnitude of these vessels.

There is a lot that can be learned from this boat because it dates back to before Illinois’ statehood, Swenson says. “It was a remarkable time in American history.”

Bonnie Burcham



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Token support

Downstate transit funding has stalled. But the need is accelerating. So these coin-strapped systems are planning an alternate route

by Bethany Jaeger

Illustrations by Kathleen Riley Young

Chicago-area mass transit has gotten most of the attention in Springfield this year. Yet two dozen of the state's 102 counties, nearly a quarter of them, lack any form of public transportation, according to the Rural Transit Assistance Center at Western Illinois University in Macomb. Another 11 counties provide mass transit service in a single city only.

Transportation advocates argue downstate deserves more attention because of public transit's critical link to the rest of the state's economy. It's a completely different system from those serving northeastern Illinois, and it doesn't come at high cost, says Linda Wheeler, former director of the Office of Planning and Programming for the Illinois Department of Transportation.

"The times that I spent riding systems down in deep southern Illinois, I went off to their chicken dinners," she says. "They were having chicken dinners to help pay for it. And the seniors were making a quilt at the senior center, which then was auctioned off to help pay for the service."

Wheeler is now a consultant and works with the Transportation for Illinois Coalition, comprised of business, labor, government and transportation groups. A report she wrote, which was published by the coalition, concludes that Illinois continues to miss the bus when it comes to capturing millions of dollars in federal grants that would

help transportation providers expand services. That's because after four years of flat funding for transit capital, the state hasn't come up with new revenue to match the federal grants since fiscal year 2004.

"New state funding for transit capital in FY 2004 was \$356 million; now it's zero," Wheeler wrote in the 2005 report.

The absence of new state money for capital led 60 downstate public transportation systems to report that, combined, they'll need \$334 million to replace aging buses, upgrade technology, repair transportation facilities and expand services through 2009, according to last year's Capital Needs Assessment commissioned by the state transportation department and the Illinois Public Transportation Association.

In addition to failing to come up with capital funds for transit, the state uses what Wheeler calls outdated funding programs to help service providers recover operating costs.

Several downstate systems are experiencing enough demand to extend services to growing areas or add evening and Sunday routes, but the state assistance isn't providing those operators with the lift they need. Further, additional counties are interested in receiving such operating assistance.

As a result, downstate systems are looking to controversial legislation, which was stalled in the Illinois House

as of mid-October, to receive state assistance to recover up to 65 percent — it's now 55 percent — of their operating costs and expand their services to unserved areas outside the current boundaries. Given the contentious legislative session this year and competing transit funding legislation in the Senate, the potential for state inaction could mean downstate transit providers will have to take the road less traveled to make the most of the resources they have.

Anna Oestreich, director of the Bond County Senior Center in Greenville, is eagerly waiting to see if the House version of a mass transit plan will squeeze through the political bottleneck created by Gov. Rod Blagojevich and House Speaker Michael Madigan. The Bond County Senior Center's transportation service is one of 15 new providers that would get reimbursed for up to 65 percent of their operating costs from the state if Rep. Julie Hamos' legislation became law.

Hamos, an Evanston Democrat, organized numerous public hearings over a couple of years and led the House Mass Transit Committee in drafting legislation designed primarily to help Chicago-area transit. The bill also would enhance the



Downstate Operating Assistance Program, which is funded through some of the state's sales tax revenue. The program serves as a supplement to federal grants.

Oestreich says her Bond County transportation service could receive up to \$170,000 to cover some operating costs and some expansions. She now receives less than \$60,000 from the state to help with her nearly \$190,000 operating budget.

The new money is particularly important, she says, because she expects demand to increase. Greenville is 45 miles east of St. Louis, and urban sprawl is inching toward her service area. But keeping up with current needs is challenging enough for small transportation districts like hers because, among other cost factors, the minimum wage and the price of gas keep going up, she says.

"Our expenses climb a lot faster than our resources do, so the Downstate Operating Assistance money is something that we are eagerly looking for in order to, No. 1, maintain existing services and, No. 2, expand."

Without the new state assistance? She says, "You can indicate a long pause

here. I don't see anything right now that would enable us to do that."

Hamos' measure also would require a 10 percent increase in funding each year. And to address the long-term capital needs of the downstate systems, the legislation would end the practice of sweeping unused sales tax revenue from the downstate transit fund into the state's general fund. That transfer amounted to \$274,000 in fiscal year 2007 after the previous year's reimbursements were paid to providers, according to the governor's Office of Management and Budget.

Hamos' measure is backed by the House speaker but opposed by the governor. Blagojevich opposes a provision that would allow Cook County to increase sales taxes as a means of reviving the financially strapped Chicago-area transit systems. The plan narrowly failed in the House in September. Another committee hearing produced ideas but no action.

A second proposal, supported by Blagojevich and his Democratic ally, Senate President Emil Jones Jr., won bipartisan support in the Senate in late September. It would create three new casinos to generate money for major

capital plans across the state, including money for downstate mass transit operating costs. But that plan also could end up in a political pothole because of the controversy over creating so many new casinos.

Members of the Illinois Public Transit Association oppose the casino plan because they believe it wouldn't provide a long-term solution, says Linda Podeschi, executive director of the Springfield-based association. She warns that the political gridlock could collide with the impending need to prepare for expansion of public transit systems around the state.

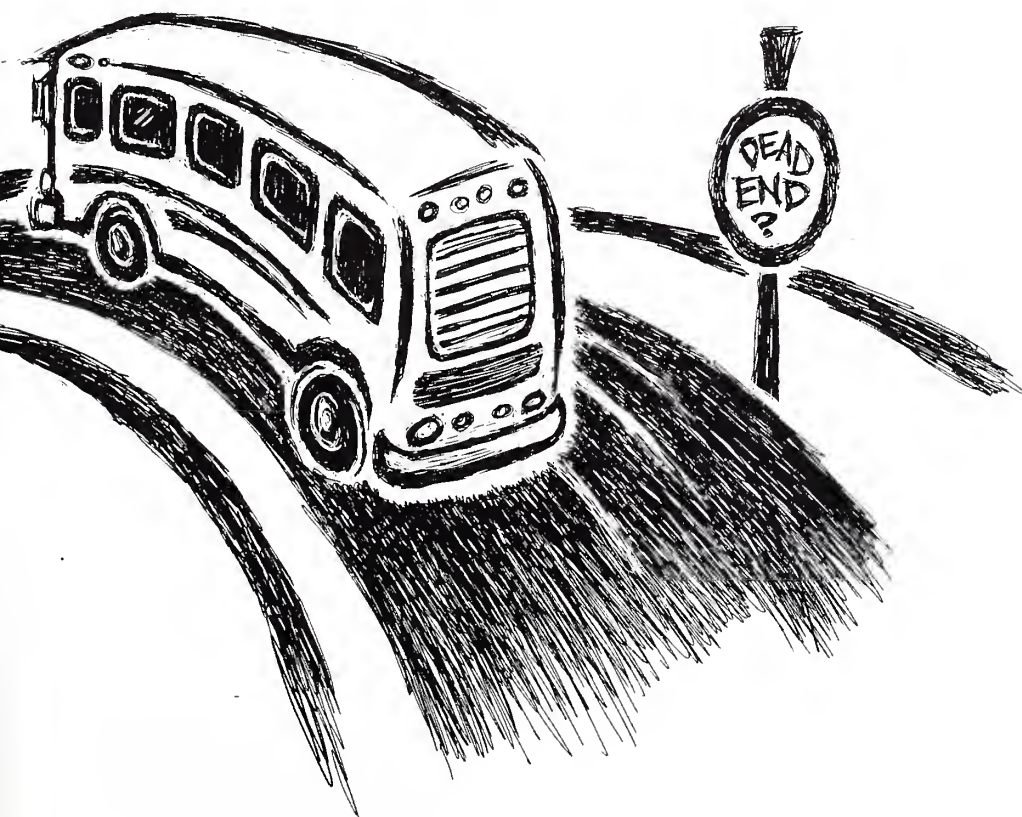
Illinois' senior population is expected to triple by 2030, according to U.S. Census projections. Along with the general population, they are moving out of the cities to less congested areas, and many rural seniors or disabled people will need help getting to doctors' offices or medical centers across county lines. Transportation providers will struggle to accommodate this aging dispersed population with aging facilities and fleets of vehicles.

If neither the House nor the Senate transit proposal wins final approval, Podeschi says to expect the status quo because nothing else is in the works.

However, there is another way downstate transportation providers, particularly those in rural areas, could improve their chances of getting state and federal dollars. Government funding programs are beginning to break with tradition by focusing on coordinated systems that mesh human services with transportation services. They're rewarding local agencies that combine to prevent, for instance, one bus driving seniors and another bus driving people with disabilities to the same destinations.

Several changes are converging. The feds recently embraced the coordination strategy, using a southern Illinois service as an example. At the same time, the state is establishing regions for coordination planning efforts. The Illinois transportation department now requires transit districts or counties to complete such planning before they receive state reimbursements for operating expenses.

The logic is simple. In fact, it's something a handful of seniors in far



southeastern Illinois accomplished in the 1970s. The Golden Circle Senior Citizen Center in rural Pope County laid the groundwork for what is now a national award-winning 14-county transportation service.

Rides, as it's called, became the First Rural Mass Transit District in 1990. It started with the mission of driving seniors to meal centers or delivering meals to homebound seniors. As it evolved, the service adapted to the communities' needs and now has a fleet of some 70 buses and a river taxi. It transports seniors, people with disabilities and the general public to jobs, doctors' appointments or any other appointment that is part of the coordinated service region.

Rides sets up contracts with local agencies to reserve seats for individuals who share destinations, but people also can hop on some of the buses that rotate within designated zones. Or they can call one main number to request a ride.

"We're the broker," says Bill Jung, Rides director and chief executive officer. "We're the mobility management entity so they have one place to go to look for a ride."

If a scheduled ride won't get a senior to a medical appointment on time, then Rides will work with the doctor's office to change the appointment so the patient can still use public transportation. Rides

will even carry a senior's groceries from her bus seat to her house. And Jung says he's working with rural medical centers to transport stretchers in nonemergency cases, a cheaper method than using one of the few ambulances in the county.

Jung says contrary to the traditional attitude, it's OK to blur the line between human services and transportation services.

"Everybody talks a lot about curb to curb, but in rural America, there's not a lot of curbs. So you really have to be responsive to the needs of the people who are using the system. You have to go a little further, do a little more."

Those efforts won national recognition with the Transit District of the Year Award from the Community Transportation Association of America in 2000. Five years later, the Rides Mass Transit District became one of five systems nationwide to win the United We Ride Leadership Award, named after the federal government's initiative to help state and local officials develop plans that serve the special needs of each community.

Despite the recognition, however, Rides faces challenges. Jung says 70 percent of the 70 buses are eligible for replacement because they have more than 300,000 miles on them.

As president of the Illinois Public Transportation Association, Jung spoke in general about such needs around the state during the annual conference in Moline this fall. "We shouldn't always have to manage this in crisis mode, where we wait until the problem becomes onerous and then we try to solve it," he said. "We see it coming. Why not solve it now?"

The root problem is the complexity of the public transportation funding system, says Edward Heflin, manager of the Rural Transportation Assistance Center. Nine federal agencies provide funding for 62 human service transportation programs. Each program has its own rules, which means funding often determines ridership.

Heflin gives this common scenario: "There's a senior and [a] disabled bus, and they pass each other. And they each had a couple of people on there. And the legislator says, 'Why should I give you money when it looks like you've got



plenty of vehicles — they just aren't full?"

A 2006 report by a state-appointed coordinating committee concludes that not only does the federal funding system encourage fragmented and redundant services, it confuses riders who have no idea how or where to get a ride.

Heflin and the center became part of the solution in 2004 in conjunction with a federal effort to coordinate all 62 funding programs. The state appointed the center to create an information clearinghouse designed to help communities follow a step-by-step guide for developing tailor-made public transportation systems. The goal is to broaden coverage, reduce duplicate services and frame mass transit as a social service.

"There is no reason that the senior bus and the disabled bus have to go to the same place and pick up different people," Heflin says. "Rides Mass Transit that has a 14-county system, they mix clients all the time. It's a myth and a fallacy that different demographics can't ride together."

Al-Trans Inc., a Marshall-based nonprofit group that is trying to bring public transportation to Clark County, started bringing nonprofit and public agencies as well as private businesses together to develop a plan of action.

The hardest part is getting people to the table, says Harley Bennet, Al-Trans chairman. "We have a lot of people who just aren't getting involved in it. They just kind of think it's something that's not appropriate for Clark County."

He says perception stymies progress because public transportation is seen as a service for the needy, though coordination efforts across the state are discovering a greater need among the general population, particularly in rural areas.

Eighteen percent of Clark County's residents, or more than 3,000 people, are 65 or older. And the Illinois secretary of state's office shows 500 of them are without driver's licenses. Yet a survey conducted by Al-Trans shows half the respondents travel across county lines to receive medical care. The other half go to hospitals in neighboring Indiana.

"We have no public transportation facilities in Clark County at all," Bennet says. "No taxi cabs. No buses. The only facilities that you could call for

organized transportation is for the school system."

One option is to seek help from existing transportation providers in neighboring counties. Rides Mass Transit, for instance, recently expanded to Crawford County just south of Clark County, but Jung says he doesn't want to stretch its resources too thin with no indication of how the state budget gridlock will be resolved.

There's some hope of getting more money for downstate service providers through four federal transportation grants, which used to be earmarked by federal lawmakers but now are part of a funding formula distributed through the state's transportation department. But those increases would simply extend the piecemeal approach and wouldn't patch every problem.

The average cost per ride in downstate rural or nonmetropolitan areas is \$25. Not only is it expensive for seniors, but it's a challenge for agencies waiting on Medicaid reimbursements to cover the cost of serving those who can't pay.

It's also expensive for providers to insure their buses, which now are considered at risk for acts of terrorism, says Michael O'Donnell, director of the East Central Illinois Area Agency on Aging in Bloomington. He adds that transit providers face the further challenge of obtaining buses with large enough dimensions to accommodate larger, newer electric wheelchairs or scooters.

While downstate and rural transportation systems face an uphill battle, Heflin says they're also entering a renaissance period. "If everybody was 100 percent efficient, and we were like robots, there's still not enough money. We are woefully underfunded on the capital side," he says. "But in the same sense, we need to prove that we are efficient. And the way to prove we are efficient is to try to work toward getting more rides to target populations for the same or fewer resources."

That means creating large economies of scale to spread the burden and reduce the risk if gas prices, insurance premiums or other regulatory costs rise.

Such transportation coordination services will become even more important as local and state planning efforts continue to uncover more demand.

The need will only accelerate. □

There's some hope of getting more money for downstate service providers through four federal transportation grants, which used to be earmarked by federal lawmakers but now are part of a funding formula distributed through the state's transportation department. But those increases would simply extend the piecemeal approach and wouldn't patch every problem.

Con-Con revisited

Illinoisans have one year to decide whether they want a new state constitution. Let the debate begin

by Pat Guinane

Photograph courtesy of the State Journal-Register

The Democratic dominance that has spawned political paralysis in Springfield can, in no small terms, be chalked up to dumb luck. A scrap of paper randomly plucked from a stovepipe hat six years ago gave Illinois Democrats the power to draw a legislative map that greatly facilitated the party's current stranglehold over state government.

This "Russian roulette" redistricting game, as one longtime political observer dubs it, is far from what the framers of the 1970 Illinois Constitution envisioned. And it's among several policy questions that loom large as Illinois prepares to ask voters if it has come time to revise the state charter.

Many observers question whether the political climate is suitable for conceiving a new constitution. The last convention, the sixth in Illinois statehood, took place in an environment surprisingly insulated from intrusion by interest groups. Delegates wrestled with myriad hot-button issues, including the death penalty and employment and housing discrimination. But they largely were able to avoid the sort of polarizing outside pressure a new crew likely would face on issues



The convention of the 1970 Constitution framers

such as abortion and gay rights.

Those who rewrote the state Constitution nearly four decades ago say their handiwork produced a blueprint built to last. Still, the ensuing years have revealed some structural weak points, and the enmity permeating prevailing discourse in Springfield could further fuel attempts to draft a new set of rules and operating procedures.

"The dysfunctional state of the state today might give cause to revisit some provisions because this is idiotic," says Marion Mayor Robert Butler, a delegate to the 1969-70 convention, popularly called Con-Con for short. "When personality conflicts engaged in by three or four leaders work to the detriment of 12 million people, there is something wrong

with that picture."

Intractable discord among Gov. Rod Blagojevich, Senate President Emil Jones Jr. and House Speaker Michael Madigan — all Chicago Democrats — has, among other things, rekindled talk of equipping Illinois voters with what amounts to an eject button for disappointing politicians. Lt. Gov. Pat Quinn floated a similar mechanism for ousting appointed utility regulators on the Illinois Commerce Commission after

electric bills began to rise last winter. And Quinn, a self-styled populist, isn't the only one intrigued by the prospect of making voter recall a constitutional right.

"As I look at some of the people who are holding office today, I'm not so sure we shouldn't have had a recall provision in there," former Metra Chairman Jeffrey Ladd says of the 1970 Constitution he helped write as a delegate from McHenry County.

But Mike Lawrence, director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University, argues a recall provision would only further enfeeble elected officials already averse to heavy lifting. "I don't want to see them become even more paranoid. I

want to see them become more courageous," he says. "Today they focus too much on the next election. If you put a recall provision into the Constitution, they'll be focusing on the next week or the next month."

Tunnel vision certainly isn't a new affliction in Illinois politics, which is why participants in the last constitutional convention are glad the General Assembly decided to make the selection of delegates a rare, nonpartisan affair. "We didn't run under a party label, which turned out to be a very good thing, even though most of the time everyone knew what party you were," says former Illinois Comptroller Dawn Clark Netsch, who began her political career as an independent Con-Con delegate. "It made it possible to develop alliances that might have been much more difficult to put together if we all had been elected either as Democrats or as Republicans."

It again would be up to the General Assembly to decide whether delegates to a new convention — two from each of the 59 state Senate districts — go on the ballot under a major party label.

"The selection process for the delegates to a new convention and the funding for the new convention would be vetted by the current General Assembly and the current administration," notes Wayne Whalen, a Chicago attorney elected to the 1969-70 convention from his hometown of Hanover, in far northwestern Illinois. "I think people are generally dispirited with the state of state government right now. These incumbents would be deciding those issues."

But first voters must decide it's time for a new constitution. That alone is no easy task. Delegates to the last convention decided the constitution question should be put to voters every other decade. But the last vote, in 1988, failed by a 3-1 margin, despite a series of awareness-raising regional hearings put on by the now-defunct state Commission on Intergovernmental Cooperation.

The question will be put to voters a year from now, on November 4, 2008. But in order for a new convention to be called, the referendum must win support from either 60 percent of those voting on the question or a majority of all voters. "Those are tough," says political scientist Kent Redfield. "You're going to have

ballot drop-off at the bottom. People are just going to skip the proposition."

In fact, more voters — 1,069,939 — ignored the question 19 years ago than those who endorsed the call for a new convention — 900,109. Redfield, a professor of political studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield, says the pooling of dissatisfaction among close observers of state government could buoy support for a new convention. But those political junkies would need to get the remaining electorate hooked on the idea.

It already may be too late. An organized coalition would need 18 months and at least \$12 million to wage a PR campaign capable of mustering voter support for a new Con-Con, say Ann Lousin, a research assistant to the 1969-70 convention, and veteran U of I political science professors Sam Gove and James Nowlan. They made that assessment to the Union League Club of Chicago in May. The trio also suggested a crisis in state government, be it a financial meltdown or a major scandal breaking just before next November, might raise enough public ire to swing a successful convention call.

Still, even a well-funded, highly motivated movement would find itself swimming against a strong pro-establishment tide. "The Constitution was a pretty hard-fought set of compromises between a lot of diverse interests in Illinois, so there's an awful lot of people who have a vested interest in the status quo, or a fear of the unknown," Redfield says. "I think you're going to have organized opposition to Con-Con. The political parties, the politicians, they know how to win with the status quo."

Thus far, few groups have taken a public position on the possibility of a new convention. The state's largest teachers union, for one, remains satisfied with the current Constitution. "When you take a bedrock document such as the state Constitution and open it up, there's the possibility that interest groups with very narrow views of the world may decide to get involved and such a situation could imperil the human and civil rights of the people in Illinois," says Charles McBarron, communications director for the Illinois Education Association. "We just don't think it's worth it."

Enthusiasm for a new constitution typically runs inversely to one's satisfaction with the current state of the state. Ralph Martire, a vocal school funding reform advocate, says he's ready to run for delegate. "It's almost as if we need a constitutional convention on school funding reform to save us from our legislators, who don't have the backbone to do it," says Martire, executive director of the Chicago-based Center for Tax and Budget Accountability. "Everyone knows it's the right thing to do, but no one is willing to do it because of purely political fears — and small-minded fears."

Delegates addressed school funding the last time around, ultimately deciding "the state has the primary responsibility for financing the system of public education." But state lawmakers have failed to put up at least 51 percent of the cost of running public schools, and the courts have dismissed the constitutional proclamation as hortatory language reflective of wishful thinking, not legislative mandate. School funding no doubt would warrant considerable attention in the drafting of a new constitution. But unlike Martire, who advocates a fundamental student entitlement backed by compulsory state funding levels, others aren't convinced Con-Con is the correct avenue for reform.

"We believe that legislation is the best way to do that," says Clare Fauke of A+ Illinois, a school funding reform advocacy group. "There's been a Constitution that spells out a primary responsibility for education funding. But that's not going to change unless legislators in Springfield actually pass laws to change that system and find new funding sources. You can't just snap your fingers and have a billion dollars in additional school spending."

At the same time, the looming prospect of a constitutional convention provides an alluring, if not whimsical, opportunity to move key policy decisions out of the hands of politicians. Groups stymied by the system could assert their voices to those who would be writing new rules of engagement.

"I think the interest groups would have considerably more influence this time than they did in the late 1960s," says Lawrence, the SIU policy institute director. "I think you would see strong interest group involvement in the election of delegates,

and that involvement would continue into the session and on the votes on issues in the convention. The trial lawyers would be very much involved. The business community certainly would be aggressively involved. And then you'd see the right-to-life and the pro-choice people. You'd probably see groups who want to advance gay marriage, and on the other side of it would be some fundamentalist religious groups."

Conservative organizations, including the Illinois Family Institute, last year sought to ask voters whether same-sex marriage should be banned in the Illinois Constitution. But they failed to gather enough valid signatures to place the nonbinding referendum on the ballot.

At the same time, it was only a year ago that state law began to protect gays and lesbians from discrimination in areas such as housing and employment. Supporters could seek to cement those protections in the state Constitution, which already prohibits discrimination on the basis of color, creed, national ancestry, physical and mental handicap, race and sex.

The current Constitution, which took effect two years before the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, also is silent on the issue of abortion. In general, abortion rights advocates say Illinois laws compare favorably to neighboring states, and they're wary of revisiting the issue in a constitutional setting.

"The problem you have with it is, once you open it up, anything can happen," says Terry Cosgrove, president and CEO

of Personal PAC. "And we do know that the vast majority of the voters and the vast majority of people in Illinois do support the right to privacy when it comes to abortion and family planning. It's also a resource question. From our organization's standpoint, do we spend a lot of time and effort and money taking a position on this versus our mission, which is to elect pro-choice candidates who would protect the reproductive rights of the women of Illinois?"

The organization spends about \$500,000 per election cycle supporting pro-choice candidates through direct-mail pieces, phone calls and get-out-the-vote efforts. If voters decide it's time for a new constitutional convention, Personal PAC, and organizations like it, would have to decide how much support to throw behind delegates sympathetic to their cause.

Ladd, a Chicago attorney who stepped down last year after 22 years at the helm of Metra, the suburban commuter rail agency, says he had to devote considerable energy to his 1969 Con-Con campaign. Fourteen candidates competed for the two delegate slots from his state Senate district. "Things were a lot cheaper then than they are today," he says. "But, yeah, you had to raise some cash."

Reaching voters in a geographic area as large as a Senate district probably would cost a candidate for delegate around \$200,000, says professor Redfield, who also directs the Illinois Sunshine Project, a research effort that tracks the role of money in state politics. Candidates in contested Illinois Senate

districts spent an average of \$210,000 last year, a 57 percent increase since 1996.

"If we are playing by current rules of raising money for a political committee and the big interest groups and the parties and the legislative leaders and constitutional officers got involved, it could be quite expensive," Redfield says. "I don't see a lot of housewives or farmers who have never been involved with politics getting elected to Con-Con."

Meanwhile, interest groups stand to play a much larger role in the swaying of delegates, with advances in technology, especially the advent of e-mail, allowing them to mobilize supporters much more swiftly. That sort of outside pressure didn't exist during the 1969-70 convention, wrote Elmer Gertz, a delegate, and Joseph Pisciotte, a top Con-Con staffer, in their 1980 book, *Charter for a New Age: An Inside View of the Sixth Illinois Constitutional Convention*, which was published for the Institute of Government and Public Affairs by the University of Illinois Press. The General Assembly created a lobbyist registration system for the convention, and nearly 60 groups signed up. But only a handful, including the Illinois State Chamber of Commerce and the Illinois Municipal League, kept continuous watch over the proceedings.

In fact, Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley was widely considered the most influential interest keeping tabs on the convention. While Netsch and other liberal Democrats from in and around the city came to the convention as an independent voting bloc, the Chicago machine sent several delegates, including

Photograph courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library



Chicago attorney Wayne Whalen, chair of the Style, Drafting and Submission Committee

Photograph courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library



Springfield labor rights attorney Mary Lee Leahy, a delegate

Photograph courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library



Attorney and former Metra Chairman Jeffrey Ladd, a delegate

the mayor's son and eventual successor, Richard M. Daley, and Michael Madigan, who would begin his long reign as House speaker 13 years later.

The Daley team arrived at the convention with four major objectives and returned to Chicago with a perfect batting average, recalls Charles N. Wheeler III, whose convention coverage for the *Chicago Sun-Times* marked the beginning of a long career in the Illinois Statehouse press corps. Daley wanted to continue the election of judges and to preserve cumulative voting, which, until voters did away with it in 1980, provided for multimember House districts. The mayor also won approval for property classification in Cook County, meaning commercial and industrial plots could be taxed at higher rates than residential property. Home rule, Daley's other triumph, freed cities from a child/parent relationship with the legislature.

"The classic example they used was, at one point Chicago wanted to change the color of the lights on its squad cars and it had to get legislative approval to do that," Wheeler says. "It had to get a bill moved through the legislature and signed by the governor to be able to change the lights on its squad cars."

While Daley's other victories might be challenged at a new constitutional convention, home rule enjoys wide support, even winning over an initial critic. Butler, who had been Marion's mayor for six years when he began work as a delegate, insisted that the population threshold for automatically obtaining home rule be set at 25,000, so the new

freedoms wouldn't apply to his city.

"At that time, I didn't think the city council had enough sense to be turned loose with the authority that you get with home rule," Butler says. "We went to home rule about nine years ago. We've had a lot of expansion and progress, most of which would not have been possible if we did not have home rule."

First and foremost, home rule gave municipalities greater authority to raise taxes and borrow money. But cities also have used it to bar handgun ownership and even ban public pay toilets. Dozens of communities smaller than 25,000 have won the powers through referendum, while only a handful of cities, including Rockford, have voted to abandon home rule. Larry Frang, assistant director of the Illinois Municipal League, says the organization sees little reason to revisit the issue in a new constitutional convention, unless delegates want to lower the population threshold in recognition of home rule's referenda success.

Replacing judicial elections with a merit appointment system, meanwhile, is a cause that hasn't gone away, despite opposition from the powers that be. "There's no way you're going to get that through the legislature as it's constituted now," says Nowlan, a senior fellow for the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois. "I think, on balance, merit selection would be better than popular selection, but I don't know if that alone justifies a convention."

Lawrence, the SIU professor, says he feels the same way about the state's

legislative redistricting process, which, in three of the past four decades, has been decided by a "Russian-roulette provision" Con-Con delegates created in the hopes of forcing bipartisan compromise. Instead, Democrats and Republicans on the decennial redistricting commissions have reached gridlock, forcing the secretary of state to draw at random the name of the party that gets to add a tie-breaking member to the panel, rendering the other party powerless over the drawing of districts.

Gov. Blagojevich's budget maneuvering in recent months also could inspire a new convention to re-examine the amendatory veto powers created by the 1970 Constitution. House Speaker Madigan over the years has sought to block gubernatorial efforts to use the veto pen to rewrite, rather than marginally revise, legislation. "I think that power was abused through the years. Even when I was working for a governor, I felt that the chief executive should not have that power," says Lawrence, who served as press secretary to former Gov. Jim Edgar. "I agree with Speaker Madigan. He and I share an aversion to the amendatory veto. I don't think the governor is a legislator."

Elsewhere, there exists nostalgia for cumulative voting, at least among a handful of die-hards. The so-called Cutback Amendment Quinn championed in 1980 reduced the membership of the House by a third. But, in doing so, it eliminated three-member districts, which had ensured each party at least one seat — and a voice — in every corner

Photograph courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library



Now-Mayor Richard M. Daley, a delegate and son of then-Mayor Richard J. Daley

Photograph courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library



Former alderman and radio host Clifford Kelley, a delegate

Photograph courtesy of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library



Former state Comptroller Dawn Clark Netsch, vice chair, Revenue and Finance Committee

of the state. Some lament the move as the start of consolidation of power among legislative leaders that has facilitated the current gridlock in Springfield.

Similar chagrin envelops the state's lingering financial woes. At the time of the last constitutional convention, delegates set out to affirm the 1969 income tax pushed by Gov. Richard Ogilvie and later upheld by the Illinois Supreme Court. Some advocated a graduated rate that would rise with the taxpayer's ability to pay, a proposal that could be revived by a new convention.

"The graduated income tax, I'm sure, would be an issue," says Netsch, vice chair of the Revenue and Finance Committee at the 1969-70 convention. "Some would probably push for it pretty strongly. I would not predict that it would happen, although I think the dynamics may have changed somewhat from 1970. One of the prices those of us

who wanted to have an income tax, and make sure it was still authorized, ended up paying was the requirement that it was a flat rate and the ratio [a link between individual and corporate income taxes]. That was primarily pressure from those who were more sensitive to the business interests, and they would still be a big factor."

The income tax, which lawmakers have hiked only twice — once temporarily — in the 37 years since Con-Con, cannot exceed a five-to-eight ratio between the individual and corporate rates. Striking that caveat from a new constitution would give a Democratic legislature and governor the power to raise the 4.8 percent corporate rate without touching the 3 percent personal income tax, a prospect sure to invite a fight from the state's business community.

The arguments against those fiscal limitations illustrate a fundamental

question raised by the prospect of a new constitutional convention. Ultimately, the 1970 Constitution was a product of compromise forged with the approval of voters in mind. If interest groups succeed in injecting their positions into a new state charter, will the state come to regret it in the decades that follow?

"I think that there's a real potential for a lot of mischief," says Whalen, who chaired the Style, Drafting and Submission Committee at the last convention. Whalen was a bit of an antagonist himself, pushing for merit selection of judges against the wishes of the Daley machine and co-sponsoring a narrowly defeated attempt to abolish the death penalty. In the waning hours of the convention, delegates supported an amendment, co-authored by Whalen, that took the judicial selection process, as well as the question of single versus multimember House districts, out of the Constitution, instead presenting them to the electorate as separate questions.

Months later, voters would opt for the status quo on both issues, also rejecting accompanying questions that gave them opportunities to end capital punishment and lower the voting age from 21 to 18. The delegates decided taking a stance on those weighty issues could sink the new Constitution, and their reasoning was rewarded when voters ratified their work by a comfortable margin.

Winning voter approval was paramount in delegates' minds. After all, the state's 1870 Constitution stood for an entire century, with voters rejecting the work of a 1920-22 convention.

Just as the death penalty was too hot to touch four decades ago, a constitutional provision for or against same-sex marriage, for instance, could doom a new document with voters. Or, if ratified, it might become a troubling anachronism for future generations. "If you start to make all those little rules prescribing conduct, I think they're rules for a passing hour rather than principles for an expanding future," says Ladd. "And it's the latter that is what a constitution should be." □

Pat Guinane is Indiana Statehouse bureau chief for The Times of Northwest Indiana. Previously, he was Statehouse bureau chief for Illinois Issues.

The path to Con-Con

A year from now, on November 4, 2008, Illinois voters will be asked whether it's time to draft a new state constitution. The framers of the 1970 Illinois Constitution decided voters should have the chance to vote every 20 years on the call of a new constitutional convention.

When last asked in 1988, Illinoisans rejected the call by a 3-1 margin, with 900,109 voting in favor of a new convention, 2,727,144 voting against it and just over 1 million voters skipping the down-ballot question.

In order for a new convention to be called, the referendum must win support from either 60 percent of those voting on the question or a majority of all voters in the election.

If voters decide they want a new convention next year, the General Assembly would be required to approve legislation providing for the election of two delegates from each of the 59 state Senate districts. A delegate hopeful must meet the same qualification as a legislative candidate, meaning he or she must be at least 21, a U.S. citizen, and have lived in the district for at least two years prior to the election. The General Assembly would be responsible for determining whether candidates for delegate run under a party label or as independents, as was the case in 1969.

Lawmakers also would be responsible for setting the first meeting date for the new convention, which must fall within three months of the delegate election. And the General Assembly would have to approve funding for the delegate elections — there was a primary and general election last time — and for the convention itself.

The last convention, which began on December 5, 1969, and ended September 3, 1970, cost \$13.9 million, with delegates earning a monthly salary of \$625 for what typically was a four-day work week. Experts suggest that convention would cost \$78 million in 2008 dollars.

Voters ratified the work of the last convention on December 15, 1970, by a vote of 1,122,425 to 838,168. And the 1970 Constitution took effect on July 1, 1971. Likewise, a new constitution would need acceptance from a simple majority of those voting on the question to achieve ratification.

Pat Guinane

Hunger's stamp

Congress is considering legislation
to raise benefits for the Food Stamp Program

by Maura Kelly Lannan

Magdalena Rosado knows she's in a tough spot. The 39-year-old Chicago resident and her 53-year-old husband Carlos lost their jobs and can't afford to pay their \$3,000 a month mortgage or buy food for their two children.

The couple has been unable to rent a second-floor apartment for about a year. His retirement savings are tapped. Their house has been for sale for four months but there's been little interest.

With close to \$20,000 in credit card and other debt looming, Rosado decided to seek help. "We stopped paying bills because we have to buy food," Rosado says. "It's either we [don't] pay bills or we don't eat."

She applied in September for food stamps.

"It's embarrassing for me to go [apply for food stamps]. I know there's people that really need it," Rosado says, adding that she has worked since she was 15 years old. "If I don't need to ask for help, I try my best and do it. This situation is getting to a point where I have to do something."

Rosado is one of millions of people across the country getting monthly financial assistance to buy food through the federal Food Stamp Program. About 26 million people a month, about half of whom are children and third of whom are working, participate nationwide, says Regan Hopper, spokeswoman for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service.

"[The program is] critical. It's the first line of defense for hungry Americans,"

says Maura Daly, vice president of government relations and advocacy for America's Second Harvest, an emergency food assistance organization.

The federal government spent about \$32.9 billion nationwide on the program during the 2007 fiscal year, with about \$30.4 billion of that for benefits and the rest for administrative expenses, says Jean Daniel, another spokeswoman for the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service. Illinois received about \$1.5 billion to spend on food stamps during fiscal year 2006.

In this state, 581,762 households with more than 1.27 million residents participated in the program in August 2007, says Rikeesha Cannon, spokes-

woman for the Illinois Department of Human Services. For the federal fiscal year 2006, an average of 556,293 Illinois households with more than 1.22 million residents took part, she says.

The monetary benefit, which varies depending on participants' assets and expenses, is intended to supplement food budgets. In Illinois, the average monthly benefit for fiscal year 2006 was \$102.25 per person, or about \$1.14 per person per meal.

However, as Congress considers reauthorization of the federal Farm Bill, which includes funds for food stamps, many advocates say the support recipients get isn't enough. Several proposed changes would increase benefits, but the issue was still under debate in mid-October.

"The amount of money given to people in food stamps is totally inadequate. Imagine anyone trying to survive on \$1 a meal a day," says U.S. Sen. Richard Durbin, an Illinois Democrat. "This notion that food stamps are like a bonus overlooks the fact that many families are scraping by with [a] limited amount of funds."

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, also an Illinois Democrat, participated last May in a challenge to members of Congress to live on the national average food stamp benefit of about \$21 per person a week, or \$1 per meal per person.

"It was more of a challenge [than] I had imagined it would be or could be," Schakowsky says. "You can't be spontaneous when you're living on so few dollars. It's very, very hard."

The federal government assumes food

FOOD STAMPS

Benefits

People in household	Maximum monthly allotment
1	\$162
2	\$298
3	\$426
4	\$542
5	\$643
6	\$772
7	\$853
8	\$975
Each additional person	+\$122

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Food and Nutrition Services

The express line

Express Stamps is an Illinois program that has made it easier for some people to apply for food stamps. The two-year pilot, which began last year, is a partnership among the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Northern Illinois Food Bank and America's Second Harvest.

The program is available in some half-dozen food pantries run by the Northern Illinois Food Bank, which provides food to 540 agencies and programs in 13 Illinois counties. Volunteers ask people who go to those pantries whether they are receiving food stamps. If they aren't but want to, they meet with someone at the pantry who is trained by the state human services department to help potential recipients submit applications online.

Applicants must be legal residents and must provide the income levels and Social Security numbers of everyone over age 18 living in their households, says Elizabeth Donovan, director of agencies and programs for the Northern Illinois Food Bank. The information is sent electronically to the state, which determines eligibility, usually within about 15 minutes, she says.

If applicants are eligible, they receive electronic benefits cards immediately. The state then mails personal identification numbers to applicants so they can activate their cards, Donovan says.

Volunteers for Express Stamps completed 849 applications through August, with an 85 percent approval rate, and about 700 electronic benefits cards were distributed, Donovan says. The average benefit was \$232 a month.

"You're bringing the program directly to someone who needs it. You're providing easy access and you're providing them with a first-time, really positive experience."

Applicants cannot participate in Express Stamps if they have received food stamps within the past year, Donovan says. Otherwise, they only receive benefits for between 30 to 45 days, after which they must re-apply at an office of the state human services department.

"It doesn't eliminate the need for people to go in and apply for food stamps. It just delays it," says Diane Doherty of the Illinois Hunger Coalition, who questioned how many people complete applications for the program after their benefits from Express Stamps end. The state, which hasn't completed its evaluation of the program, can't yet provide that information, says Rikeesha Cannon, the Illinois Department of Human Services spokeswoman.

Joy Smith, an Express Stamps volunteer whose husband is the executive director of the Northern Illinois Food Bank, says it's rewarding to help people who don't know they are eligible for food stamps. Jon Habegger, a former Express Stamps volunteer who now works for the food bank, says he most enjoys seeing excitement on people's faces when they realize they are eligible.

"There's that sense of hope that, 'Somebody does care about me,'" Habegger says. "The idea is, if we can at least get them a [benefits] card, then they will say, 'Hey, this is good. I will go see DHS,' because the Department of Human Services may be able to provide them the help they need."

Maura Kelly Lannan

stamp recipients supplement their benefits with other money, but she didn't. She says there are probably many recipients who rely only on food stamps to buy all of their food.

Schakowsky shopped twice in the week. She says she could afford one large tomato and a potato, and she bought a chicken for about \$6, which she used to make a dinner, a sandwich, chicken salad and soup. She also ate some tuna, pasta and Ramen Noodles, and gave up her habit of drinking Diet Pepsi.

Schakowsky says she takes medication for high blood pressure, and because the noodles are high in sodium, a nutritionist told her she would not have been healthy for long had she remained on that diet.

She, Durbin and some other members of the Illinois congressional delegation sent a letter in May to leaders of the House and Senate agriculture committees asking for higher food stamp benefits, a review of current eligibility restrictions and simpler rules for participation.

The House approved the Farm Bill in July, but the Senate has yet to act. Programs included in the measure, such as food stamps, expired September 30 but were extended temporarily to give lawmakers time to reach an agreement.

The House version of the Farm Bill would increase the minimum standard deduction recipients in households of one to three can subtract from their income. That deduction reflects the cost of such nonfood items as housing and transportation. It has been set for those households at \$134 for at least 10 years, but would increase to \$145 and would be adjusted for inflation annually under the proposed changes, says Dorothy Rosenbaum, senior policy analyst for the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington, D.C.-based policy analysis and advocacy group.

"Food stamp benefits are, for most families, eroding in value each year," Rosenbaum says, adding that proposed changes to the standard deduction would stop such erosion. "Every year, people's food stamps can purchase less and less food."

Daly of America's Second Harvest says that many food stamp recipients run out of benefits before the end of each month.

Other proposed changes in the House version of the Farm Bill include increasing

the minimum food stamp benefit, which goes mostly to elderly or disabled people, from \$10 a month to \$16 a month and adjusting it for inflation annually; allowing recipients to deduct all child care expenses from income; and excluding certain education and retirement savings accounts from being counted toward participants' asset limits.

To qualify for food stamps, most households, except those with elderly or disabled members, can't have monthly gross incomes higher than 130 percent of the poverty line, which would be \$1,721 or less for a family of four, or \$20,650 annually, says Hopper, spokeswoman for the USDA Food and Nutrition Service. No household can have a monthly net income above 100 percent of poverty, she says.

The Food Stamp Program reached 65 percent of eligible participants as of 2005, the most recent figures available, says Ellen Vollinger, legal director for the Food Research and Action Center, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that does research and advocacy on hunger in the country.

As of 2004, the U.S. Department of Agriculture estimated that 67 percent of eligible Illinoisans were participating, Cannon says.

In fact, the U.S. Department of Agriculture ranked Illinois as 16th best out of 50 states and the District of Columbia for reaching eligible food stamp participants in 2004, Vollinger says. In 2006, Illinois received an award of \$2.3 million from the federal department for increasing participation among those who were potentially eligible, Cannon says.

The human services department and community organizations implemented various programs recently to encourage further participation. The state department now allows working families who are recipients to re-apply through a telephone interview system and is expecting to start an online food stamp application soon, Cannon says.

There are nonprofit efforts, too. The Illinois Hunger Coalition has developed a receipt system so that food stamp applicants' personal information is properly submitted to the human services department.

"We try to educate people about what their rights are, what their responsibilities are, so they are informed consumers," says

FOOD STAMPS

Income limits

People in household	Gross monthly income	Net monthly income
1	\$1,107	\$851
2	\$1,484	\$1,141
3	\$1,861	\$1,431
4	\$2,238	\$1,721
5	\$2,615	\$2,011
6	\$2,992	\$2,301
7	\$3,369	\$2,591
8	\$3,746	\$2,881
Each additional person +377		+\$290

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services

Diane Doherty, executive director of the coalition.

The Greater Chicago Food Depository visited five senior citizen housing sites between June and August to help elderly people complete food stamp applications, says Alicia Huguelet, director of public policy at the food depository. Workers enrolled about 50 people, she says. She hopes to extend the program to food pantries.

Catholic Charities of Chicago also assists people with food stamp applications at some of its emergency food sites, says Christene Dykes-Sorrells, the group's emergency assistance department director.

A major introduction to food stamps is through schools. The Chicago Public Schools started a program about four years ago to help parents of students enroll their children in health insurance or apply for other poverty programs such as food stamps. The Children and Family Benefits Unit of the school system employs 11 liaisons who help families apply for such benefits, usually over the telephone. The unit tells parents about its services through meetings and fliers as well as targeted mailings.

It received almost 2,000 phone calls seeking assistance and had completed 600 applications between the start of this school year and the end of September, says Annie Lionberger, the unit's manager.

"Schools are the best place to do this," Lionberger says, adding that she hopes other school districts adopt her program. "Schools are probably the only government institutions that people, especially disenfranchised people, tend to trust."

LaTanya Gandy-Wheatley, a unit liaison, says her telephone is always ringing and the majority of the calls are for food stamps.

"We have a lot of clients at this point who are losing their jobs or who are working and not making very much money that are finding out they are qualifying for food stamps," Gandy-Wheatley says. "Most people that need this assistance are working people. They don't have to take the day off. They can just call us on the phone."

Rosado, who applied for food stamps recently after getting information from the unit, hopes that the monetary assistance she gets will help feed her 8-year-old son Joshua and 18-year-old daughter Brendalis. Her son recently offered to help by selling water, Rosado says, her voice breaking before she began to cry.

About food stamps Rosado says, "I've got no other choice but to try it." □

Maura Kelly Lannan is a Washington, D.C.-based freelance reporter who formerly covered Illinois government and politics for The Associated Press in Chicago.

Dan A. Lewis

As director of the Illinois Family Study, the Northwestern University professor led researchers from several universities in a four-year project that followed some 1,300 families who were affected by the federal welfare-to-work legislation that took effect in 1997. Researchers interviewed the families once a year about topics that included employment, education, health and household composition.

Under legislation sponsored by then-state Sen. Barack Obama, the University Consortium on Welfare Reform was charged with reporting to the legislature annually about the status of families surveyed. Lewis, who was asked to lead the study by the Illinois Department of Human Services, has completed a book manuscript about the study, which has the working title Welfare Reform and the Limits of Inclusion.

Lewis is professor of human development and social policy and a faculty fellow in Northwestern's Institute for Policy Research.

At the 10th anniversary of the start of the welfare-to-work law, he talked about its impact with Illinois Issues Managing Editor Maureen Foertsch McKinney. This is an edited version of the conversation.

Q. Can you tell me about your research? What did the numbers show about how many people are off the welfare rolls?

I think there are two lenses to look through — the poverty reduction lens and the welfare reduction lens. And, if you look at all 50 states, the welfare rolls have gone down about 60 percent from where they were in 1996-97, an extraordinary 60 percent. In Illinois, it's more like 85 percent. If you're thinking about welfare reduction, the way Illinois went about implementing the legislation and the way Illinois already knew it wanted to reduce the welfare

Photograph by David Bacon



Dan A. Lewis

rolls, I would argue that we've done the best job of any state in the union. Because not only have the welfare rolls gone down — and you can do that by being punitive and just kicking people off the rolls — but as far as our research could tell, the welfare reduction did not do great harm to the people who left the rolls, and that's a terrific accomplishment.

Illinois, when it passed the legislation in 1995, anticipated lots of the kinds of changes that went into the federal law, and so did a lot of other states. It's easy to think about [President] Bill Clinton ending welfare as we know it and the Republican Congress in 1996 taking a lot of credit for what was going on. But this didn't just come out of Washington. Illinois and a lot of states were ahead of the curve in terms of going in this direction before the federal legislation took effect and anticipating the way the federal law was going to be written. That heralded well for the poor in Illinois because it was done in an intelligent and nonpunitive way, and we in Illinois were already thinking in that direction before the law got passed in Washington.

In the 1990s, we were clear that we

had to change the way we were doing welfare in this state. Even the fact that my study was funded [largely by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur and the Joyce foundations in the initial phase] showed there were common ideas about welfare, and what to do and how to do it. But you didn't want to do it in a way that made the lives of people on welfare worse. The Illinois legislature understood that.

Overall, the way they went about doing it was to see that somebody would be OK once they left the welfare rolls. When the bill became law, one of the controversial aspects was a five-year lifetime limit on receiving welfare. So once the law went into effect, the longest you could receive welfare, no matter what, was five years. And everybody on the left was sure that this was a terrible idea, that it would leave people destitute. It would cause all kinds of problems. It was arbitrary. It didn't have anything to do with whether someone was ready to get off welfare or not.

Well, one of the things people were worried about is this five-year limit on welfare receipts, and I think you could count on one hand or two the number of people in Illinois who actually hit the five-year limit and then were thrown off.

So that's really interesting. If the state could organize itself to get people off and not have catastrophe with people hitting the five years, that is really quite an accomplishment.

Q. So has it worked, or are people simply no longer getting help?

The poverty reduction question is more complicated than the welfare reduction story. Our research shows a lot of interesting — and what looks to people like contradictory — trends, but I actually don't think they're contradictory.

One of them is that, on average, the income that people had in their pockets,

the people who were in our sample, doubled over the four years that we did the study. So the amount of money people had went up and went up significantly. Now nobody got rich. The notion that people were going to be destitute if they left welfare didn't turn out to be the case, and, in fact, income levels rose. There also were different mechanisms involved: people in the labor market, people still getting other government sources rather than the welfare.

But it also is true that there turned out to be a ceiling on what people earned. People didn't get much above \$25,000. There was certainly some massive welfare reduction. There was some poverty reduction, but not in a way that got people out of a very tough situation in terms of having the resources to make ends meet.

This ceiling probably had a lot to do with the type of jobs that they are going to be competitive for given their education, given their work backgrounds. You know you're going to have some difficulty in getting about \$10 to \$15 an hour in terms of the work you can do, and if you've got kids and are living on the margin. The good news on the poverty side is that things didn't get worse for people. They did get better. But they didn't [improve] enough so that the contingencies and difficulties of poverty didn't stop people from living on the margins.

The other thing that's interesting is that, even though the welfare rolls dropped a very impressive 85 percent to 90 percent, the work patterns of people stayed pretty solidly 50/50, meaning that half our sample was in the labor market but the other half, they weren't in the conventional labor market.

How did they make ends meet? People were getting money from relatives. They were getting money informally. They were getting money from other government programs. That's not what anybody would call a victory, no matter which side of the aisle they're on. If half the people on

welfare disappear into this murky world of depending on other people and depending on the informal economy to make a buck, then that's not good for anybody, and I think that's one of the unsolved and important questions that we need to face as we go forward.

Q. Is it accurate to say welfare is gone as we knew it?

Demographically, Illinois had the most racialized welfare population in the Midwest. What I mean by that is the percentage of people who were on welfare who were African American was significantly higher than our neighboring states. One of the really interesting things about the disappearance of welfare as we know it in Illinois is the end to the kind of racial politics that had kind of poisoned the country, in my opinion, all through the '80s and '90s.

And so it's been one of the interesting things about inclusion here, that you think of getting rid of the welfare program as having some negative impacts. But once everybody's in the same boat, trying to make a decent living and take care of their kids, and you can't distinguish a dependent population — who's getting a government stipend on the basis of their skin color — because that segment is not there anymore. It draws us together.

And it makes questions of poverty nonracial in the sense that there are lots of women who are raising kids on their own who don't have enough resources, and they come in all shapes and sizes and colors, and they're all taxpayers and voters in Illinois.

And if you have to create a system where you have them go to work and you don't do much about what they are being paid when they go to work, then you better figure out a system to make work pay. If the people who are going to work are doing their end of things, then the rest of society is responsible for doing its end of things, which is to provide wraparound systems and support to make work pay. And you know I think Illinois has made some

progress in that direction, but that's what the next 10 years is going to be about when it comes to poverty reduction.

[We need] an inclusion sort of strategy that builds on work but then puts supports around the person so that even if wages are low, there are ways in which you can feed your kids and support yourself and live a decent life.

Q. What does the state need to do from here?

We need to think about what you might call wraparound services and wraparound supports — some of which are in place. The Earned Income Tax Credit has already been in place and is a very important part of the story — an income tax credit for low-wage workers is vital as a support system because you get this tax credit if you're working and your income is low. That's a tremendous plus. Child care is terrifically important. Health insurance for yourself and your kids is an important piece. Transportation so that you can get to a job that's far away from your home is an important piece. Education and job training so you can improve your skills are important pieces. So if a package can be created that puts it all together, that makes sense.

Q. It sounds as though some of the pieces are already in place, but others remain to be done?

That's what the next 10 years are going to be about in terms of what needs to be done about poverty. Child care is a demonstrated need. You need health insurance for you and your family, and you need help in job training and education. For transportation, we have to have some efficient way for you to get to a job. I think job training and education are big pieces of the story. People need service and support to keep working. □

Murder and revenge

Capital punishment and the problem of emotion in public policy

Essay by Christopher Z. Mooney

In the winter of 1975, 42-year-old Mike Mooney was working in a run-down gas station in Bluffton, Ga., a small town in the southwestern part of the state that was as down at its heels as he was. On January 22, Mooney was closing up when three men accosted him looking for the day's receipts. One thing led to another, and, as can happen when inept and desperate men hook up with guns and alcohol, Mooney was shot and killed along with three other men who happened to be in the station at the time.

That night, murder came into my life for the first time — Mike Mooney was my father. Victims of crime are often involved or evoked in the debate over criminal justice policy, especially when the crime is as personal as murder or rape. At 16 years old, my response to his murder was intense and emotional, but also complicated and confused. My father had left us — my mother, brother, three sisters and me — the year before his murder after 10 tumultuous years of heavy drinking and moving from town to town, so my relationship with him was even more mixed up than normal.

But the emotion that pushed through my psyche most powerfully was a desire for revenge. I wanted justice. I was outraged at what had been done, and I wanted the perpetrators to pay with their lives. When the three killers eventually received life sentences for their heinous act, I was infuriated. Thus, my first experience with murder and capital punishment — or the lack thereof — was driven by random events and a teenager's raw emotion and confusion.

A decade later, murderers were again in my life, as I worked as a guard in a Wisconsin maximum-security prison for the criminally insane. I had no special interest in criminal justice; it was just the best job that an ex-sailor with a bachelor's degree in English could get during the recession of the early 1980s.

There were plenty of murderers on my unit. Ed Gein — the model for Tony Perkins' character in *Psycho* — was there before my time, and Jeffrey Dahmer came through after I had moved on. But most of our inmates were not obviously crazy or even particularly unpleasant. For a recreational activity, I even put together a band on the unit; both the drummer and guitarist were murderers. On the other hand, there were also murderers on the unit who were clearly very bad men — cold, manipulative, willing to do anything they could get away with to gain an advantage, whether to get an extra piece of chicken at dinner or a good word to the parole board.

My interactions with these inmates — murderers or not — were generally very bureaucratic. I was a state worker, but rather than conducting driving tests or patching potholes, my job was to monitor and control convicts. I had a certain type of personal relationship with those guys — some I liked, some I didn't — but that did not affect my day-to-day interactions with them. I didn't know their victims, nor did I think much about them. To do so would interfere with my job.

Then one summer evening, an inmate almost killed one of my coworkers in an escape attempt. The inmate was in the process of strangling him when two

other guards spotted the break, but my colleague suffered permanent damage to his neck and throat.

With this, I, along with my other coworkers, again became a member of a crime victim's family. The rage that we felt at the attack made many of us — myself included — quite willing to assist in that inmate's execution, had he been sentenced to death. Many of us loudly expressed the deep disappointment that we lived in a state that didn't have the death penalty. And since these strong personal emotions — anger, loss, vengeance — would have kept us from being good state bureaucrats around the offending inmate, he was transferred to another unit. It was a routine matter of policy.

Murder is the ultimate crime. The willful taking of another person's life holds a special place in our literature, our culture and, of course, our criminal justice system. In the United States today, it is the only crime that can result in that unique and controversial type of government action: execution. The only other time our society sanctions governmental killing is in combat and in certain police actions. But combat and police homicide are distinct from execution. In an execution, government officials intentionally, carefully and, pursuant to an order of a court of law, kill a human being.

For decades, the question of whether Illinois should execute murderers has been very much on the minds of policy-makers and advocacy groups, those opposed to and in favor of capital punishment. Our current state of legal

limbo — a moratorium on executions but not on death sentencing — began as a temporary move by former Gov. George Ryan in 2000 and was continued by Rod Blagojevich after his election as governor in 2002. But this situation is untenable in the long run.

Starting with Anthony Mertz just six weeks after Ryan's blanket commutation of all the state's Death Row inmates in 2003, judges and juries have continued to sentence murderers to death. Today, 13 men await execution in the Pontiac Correctional Center. In time, as more and more people are sentenced to death and Death Row fills again, the state's policy-makers will need to decide again whether Illinois should execute at least its most heinous murderers.

Years after leaving the Wisconsin state correctional system and receiving training as a political scientist, I was once again confronted with murderers, this time as a scholar trying to explain why some states allowed for their execution and others did not. In this role, I was even more detached and objective than I was as a state bureaucrat. I collected state-level data, devoid of any personal characteristics of murderers or victims. In my analysis of the data, I found that, even to a greater extent than for many other types of policy, the states follow public opinion closely on capital punishment. That is, in deciding whether to allow executions, state legislators and governors appear to adopt less detached rationality about the causes and effects of policy, less careful evaluation of its pros and cons, than they do in, say, regulating telecommunications or setting educational standards. In deciding capital punishment policy, state policymakers appear to take a careful reading of public opinion and then follow it.

I wasn't surprised by this. As a victim of crime, I understand the intensity of the emotions involved. The average citizen rarely gets in touch with his or her state legislators or governor, but a victim's outrage is the sort of motivation that can produce such contact. Elected officials want to be re-elected, so they make every effort to follow their

The 13 men on Death Row in Pontiac

Thirteen are 25 to 65 years old.

Five are sex offenders.

Six are white, non-Hispanic. Five are black. Two are Hispanic.

Six were sentenced in Cook County.

Two were sentenced in the collar counties.

Four were sentenced in central Illinois.

One was sentenced in southern Illinois.

SOURCE: The Illinois Department of Corrections

constituents' wishes, especially when they are expressed strongly, and especially when there is not someone equally passionate on the other side of the issue. And there is the rub with criminal justice policy — there isn't anyone on the other side. Or at least there aren't as many on the other side with the moral authority and outrage of victims of crime. Being labeled "soft on crime" is one of the fastest ways for a politician to lose a re-election bid. Consequently, policy-makers are very responsive to the inflamed emotions of crime victims, their relatives and those many, many Americans who fear being victimized themselves.

But this is the wrong way to make criminal justice policy, in my judgment. Victims react harshly, out of fear and vengeance; public policy should be designed carefully and passed thoughtfully so that it will have the desired effects without any undesired side-effects. In the course of human evolution, emotions have been tremendously useful; anger and fear provide that boost of adrenaline sometimes needed to survive a dangerous encounter when all that we have are our own resources. But this is not the situation under which public policy is set. Government supplies us with tremendous resources beyond our own wits, reducing the need for knee-jerk, irrational actions. Emotions can compel us to make a judgment before we have the time to consider all the consequences of our actions. Policy decisions can be made in a cold, clear light, calmly, consciously, rationally, and with all the best information available. Average citizens, especially those who have been victims of crime, are certainly not forming their opinions about criminal justice policy in this way.

I understand the emotions of crime victims, but I also believe that government cannot be driven by emotion and survive

long. Governments are far stronger than individual people. Under certain conditions, state government has the power and legal right to take your money, your liberty and your life. But to maintain its legitimacy — its single most important resource — a government must only use the minimum amount

of power necessary to achieve the goals that its leaders decide upon. If a government exerts more power than necessary, whether through the death penalty, taxation, business regulation or whatever, its citizens will begin to fear it, resent it and disengage from it, and the quality of governance and society will suffer as a consequence.

The state of Illinois can put its murderers to death — it has the capacity and the constitutional right. But it doesn't need to do so. Deterrence and rehabilitation should be the primary goals of criminal justice policy, not vengeance. Executions deter few — if any — murders, and they certainly do not rehabilitate. Executing murderers accomplishes nothing except perhaps to satisfy victims' and society's lust for retribution. Our elected representatives have the responsibility to temper our base emotions, including our gut-level reactions to the horrible and unfair loss that is murder. They regularly moderate our emotions in public policy in a variety of ways, but this usually happens through the political marketplace of interest groups and constituent preferences. Murderers have no strong interest group, and there is little public sympathy to temper the impact of public sentiment against them.

In their deliberations on the death penalty, Illinois' lawmakers and governor need to show some rationality and leadership and end the death penalty in Illinois once and for all. □

Christopher Z. Mooney is a professor of political studies with the Institute of Government and Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Springfield. He is co-author of the forthcoming State and Local Politics: Institutions and Reform, to be released in January by Wadsworth Publishers.

In the public interest

What would happen if Illinois' nonprofits failed to thrive because of poorly managed finances or staff?

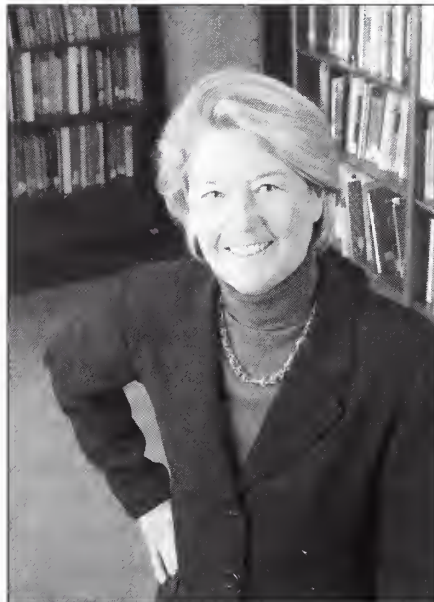
by Valerie S. Lies

How many children play in sports leagues? How many attend day care? How many low-income older persons or persons with disabilities benefit from services that allow them the dignity of living independently? How many families visit museums or take part in cultural festivals? All of these activities, as disparate as they are, involve Illinoisans in giving or receiving the services of nonprofit organizations.

Illinois nonprofits, including grantmaking foundations, house the homeless, feed the hungry, enrich lives through the arts, educate the young and care for the elderly. In fact, four out of five Illinois residents — people of all ages, backgrounds and incomes — benefit in some way from the services of at least one nonprofit. Each and every day, Illinois nonprofits improve the public good in abundant ways.

We can expect this to be even more the case in the future. With an eye to cost savings and sensitivity to community concerns, the public sector is increasingly turning to nonprofits to help fulfill its obligations. With funding from state government, for instance, nonprofits staff health and social service hotlines, provide employment and training services and meet low- and moderate-income families' need for child care.

But the public sector should offer more than financial support. It should set clear and reasonable guidelines for nonprofit governance and accountability; ensure opportunities for resources and



Valerie S. Lies

training that will help nonprofits understand and carry out their legal, ethical and fiduciary obligations; and maintain active involvement in the nonprofit sector.

Why do these guidelines and this training matter? What would happen if nonprofits failed to thrive because of poorly managed finances or staff? What if nonprofit board members did not carry through on their obligation to provide effective oversight of the organization's work? Without strong and informed leadership, organizations and institutions that we have come to rely on for services to improve the public good would not be able to carry out their missions effect-

ively or use resources wisely. A treasured museum might fall into disrepair. A theater could close its doors. The local hospital may not provide the level of service the community has come to expect and depend on.

The nonprofit sector has grown by leaps and bounds over the past decade. Here in Illinois, more than 150 new nonprofit organizations are created each month. As the sector has grown, stories about poorly managed nonprofits and misused charitable funds have caught the attention of policymakers. Legislators at the state and federal levels are taking a closer look at nonprofits, considering legislation to regulate everything from the number of board members nonprofits may have to the ways in which they can maintain nonprofit status to revisions in annual forms nonprofits file with the Internal Revenue Service.

As the state budget tightens, Illinois nonprofits are facing increasing service demands and calls for greater accountability on the use of public and private resources. But in reality, nonprofits have always been concerned about effective governance and management. Staff struggles with ways to help board members understand their roles and encourages them to support the organization, while board members struggle with ways to best fulfill their obligations.

In addition to national associations, nonprofits have relied on a host of local resources for assistance and support

Illinois Nonprofit Principles and Best Practices

The Donors Forum offers the following guidelines:

1. The organization has a clearly stated charitable or educational mission, approved by the governing body, in pursuit of the public good.
2. The role, responsibilities, selection and tenure of the governing body are clearly stated in the organization's governing and policy documents and understood by the governing body members.
3. The governing body ensures that its members are competent, knowledgeable and sufficiently diverse in point of view and experience to provide credible and effective oversight of all aspects of the organization's work.
4. The governing body regularly assesses the organization's mission and the effectiveness of the organization and its leadership in achieving it.
5. The full membership of the governing body is responsible for the organization, and each member acts at all times in an ethical manner and in the best interest of the organization and the public.
6. The governing body and staff know about and comply with all federal, state and local laws, regulations and fiduciary responsibilities.
7. The governing body exercises active oversight of the financial affairs of the organization and sets policies to ensure that the organization's resources are used appropriately in furtherance of the organization's mission.
8. The organization makes information about its mission, program activities and finances available to the public and communicates in a clear and timely manner with those who request information.
9. Organizations that raise funds from the public or from donor institutions ensure that all solicitation communications are accurate and correctly reflect the organization's mission and use of solicited funds.
10. Grantmaking organizations establish, follow, and clearly communicate processes for receiving, reviewing, and acting on grant applications and for monitoring and evaluating grants made.

See the www.donorsforum.org/publictrust/principles.html for more information.

concerning management and governance issues, including the United Way, community colleges, universities, community foundations, and more recently, centers for effective nonprofits.

Here in Illinois, the Donors Forum helped create and staffs the attorney general's Charitable Advisory Council, a group of volunteer experts who advise the attorney general on policies that are realistic for nonprofits to adhere to, while still ensuring transparency and public accountability. Further, we have led efforts to strengthen management and governance of the nonprofit sector in the Chicago region for more than 30 years.

In response to increased scrutiny of nonprofit financial, governance and management practices, we recently launched the Preserving the Public Trust Initiative, which is designed to help nonprofit organizations throughout

Illinois take specific steps to ensure adherence to high ethical standards and strong governance principles. We provide a range of tools and practical advice to assist nonprofits with this task, such as workshops on governance and online how-to tips, tools and sample policies.

Connecting with nonprofit leaders statewide through a task force, local focus groups and online feedback opportunities, the Donors Forum also created the *Illinois Nonprofit Principles and Best Practices*, a guide to great governance for nonprofits. Creating the Public Trust Initiative and the *Principles and Best Practices* stems from the Donors Forum's mission to promote an effective and informed nonprofit sector in Illinois.

Through new efforts to reach out to nonprofits statewide, the Donors Forum also will be partnering with libraries,

nonprofit service centers and community foundations throughout Illinois to make more training workshops and reference materials available to nonprofits in every part of our state. Updates on Donors Forum activity will be posted on our Web site: www.donorsforum.org.

Illinois residents rely on nonprofits for a range of activities, including the delivery of state services. Effectively and efficiently run nonprofit organizations will ensure that day care, health care delivery and cultural opportunities meet the public's expectations and needs. Informed leadership at the board and staff level — as well as sound policy and financial support from government — will prove enormously beneficial to Illinois nonprofits, and in turn to Illinoisans whose lives they enrich. □

Valerie S. Lies is president and CEO of the Donors Forum.

Court order

Benton attorney **Courtney Cox** will become U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Illinois on November 4 and will serve until President George W. Bush fills the position. He replaces **Randy Massey**, whose appointment expired.



Courtney Cox

Four judges in the district appointed Cox, saying he is "eminently qualified" for the position, according to the court's order of appointment.

Republicans in the U.S. House recommended Cox for the permanent position, which Cox says he expects the president to agree to.

"It's an honor any time you're asked to serve your country," he says.

He'll serve an administrative and supervisory role overseeing 40 attorneys in 38 counties that stretch to the southern tip of the state. He will share his time between the court's Benton and Fairview Heights offices.

Cox previously spent 22 years with the Benton law firm Hart & Hart. He also was admitted to practice law before many state and federal courts.

He garnered attention in federal court when he represented several police officers in cases alleging racial discrimination against the Springfield Police Department. Part of the case was dismissed and led the judge to turn over transcripts to the Illinois Attorney Registration and Disciplinary Commission to see if the conduct of lawyers on both sides of the case violated ethics rules. Some of the case is ongoing. While another attorney will replace Cox for that case, the issue still sparks emotion.

"I've tried a lot of race cases, and I know that they are just emotionally charged. It's an issue that can only be dealt with if you face it head on and deal with it and deal with it openly, have dialogue, communication. And all too often that's missing, so you end up with very emotional feelings. It's just inevitable."

He earned his law degree from Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

SHIFT AT THE TOP

Illinois Treasurer Alexi Giannoulias appointed **S. Raja Krishnamoorthi** as deputy treasurer in September. He previously was a partner at Kirkland & Ellis in Chicago, practicing in commercial litigation. He also served as a special assistant attorney general in the Illinois attorney general's public integrity unit. His political background includes working in U.S. Sen. Barack Obama's 2004 U.S. Senate campaign.

A woman's touch

Not a moment can be wasted when the presidential primaries are right around the corner, says **Becky Carroll**, the new director of women for the presidential campaign of U.S. Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois. She's responsible for organizing women volunteers in such early primary states as Illinois, Iowa and New Hampshire.

Formerly, Carroll was spokeswoman and chief of staff for the Illinois Office of Management and Budget under Gov. Rod Blagojevich. She also has worked in other government jobs and in political campaigns since graduating from Loyola University Chicago in 1994. She went on to work in communications for the campaigns of Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, Al Gore's 2000 presidential bid, U.S. Rep. Rahm Emanuel and Chicago Alderman Tom Tunney.

"I've been with winners and losers and candidates with a lot of money and no money, and I've done congressional, presidential, mayoral, statewide, so I'm ready for whatever curveball that may be thrown at me," Carroll says. "And I think that experience better prepares me for when the tough days are going to come because there are always tough days on any campaign."

NOBEL LAUREATES

An award-winning faculty

Roger Myerson is the 24th Nobel laureate in Economic Sciences at the University of Chicago and the 80th laureate in the university's history.

The economics professor was one of three recipients of the 2007 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for his contribution to a "mechanism design theory" used to analyze when markets work and when they don't, according to the university's news release. The theory has been used to study the effectiveness of trading, regulations and voting procedures.

Myerson, who spent 25 years teaching at Northwestern University in Evanston, previously applied game theory to political science as a way to compare electoral systems. For instance, he studied ways in which voting rules can create the strongest incentives for elections to eliminate political corruption.

He shares the 2007 award with **Leonid Hurwicz** of the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and **Eric Maskin** of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, New Jersey.

A AWARD

Doug Scott, director of the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, received the 2007 Keep Illinois Beautiful Environmental Vision Award, the highest honor given by the state's nonprofit affiliate of Keep America Beautiful Inc.

A Rockford native, Scott previously served as mayor and state representative. He has served as the environmental agency's director since 2005. As Rockford city attorney, he worked with the state agency to initiate curbside recycling and collection programs for compost, used tires and hazardous waste, according to the agency. He also was a founding member and first president of the Illinois Chapter of the National Brownfields Association.

Scott currently chairs the Illinois Climate Change Advisory Group that plans ways to reduce greenhouse gases. He also oversees efforts to reduce mercury emissions from power plants, clean illegal dumps and redevelop industrial cities along rivers.

More indictments involve prisons

Michael Mahoney, a prominent prison consultant and former director of a nonprofit prison watchdog group, was indicted on federal charges related to a kickback scheme with **Donald Snyder Jr.**, the former director of the Illinois Department of Corrections (see *Illinois Issues*, September, page 34).

Mahoney was a longtime director of the John Howard Association of Illinois, which is based in Chicago, and worked to combat overcrowding in Cook County Jail.

The association was not named or involved in the federal indictment. Mahoney worked for the organization for 27 years and retired in 2002. "He held a reputation as an energetic, informed corrections expert whose practical suggestions and recommendations positively influenced corrections operations, staffing, reforms and activities in Illinois and throughout the country," the association said in a statement.

Arthur Don, chairman of the association's board of directors, says the board was surprised and saddened by the indictment. He adds that Mahoney was nationally recognized and "had the best interest of adult and juvenile prisoners in his heart."

Mahoney allegedly agreed to pay cash to Snyder in order to secure state contracts for his clients who sought to provide health care services in Illinois prisons. According to the indictment, Mahoney also failed to disclose details of his consulting business on state reports as required by law for lobbyists.

The indictment charges Snyder received \$20,000 in the scheme. Two lobbyists for health care companies, **John Robinson** of Barrington Hills and **Larry Sims** of Pleasant Plains, also were part of the plan, which the indictment says began in 1999 when Snyder served under former Gov. **George Ryan**. The two pleaded guilty in August.

The indictments stem from the federal Operation Safe Road investigation that led to Ryan's conviction.

QUOTABLE

“Both sides are trying to gain some advantage and build coalitions that will allow them to win. But we’ve gotten to a point where I’m not sure what winning is anymore.”

Political scientist Kent Redfield of the Center for State Policy and Leadership at the University of Illinois at Springfield. He was speaking to the Chicago Tribune about Gov. Rod Blagojevich's and House Speaker Michael Madigan's dueling budget strategies. The two Democratic leaders have been conducting a high-profile test of wills since January.

More shifts in purchasing agency

Mark Kolaz, former chief of staff for the state purchasing agency, resigned last month shortly after The Associated Press reported that a company he shares ownership in has been paid more than \$1 million in state funds over the past five years, though state law prohibits some of it.

According to the AP, state records show that Modern Mailing & Printing Service, a company Kolaz has a 20 percent financial interest in, bid on and received three contracts totaling \$157,000 after he was hired by the state. Modern Mailing & Printing got other state work that didn't require bids. Those contracts weren't prohibited.

State law forbids highly paid state employees "to have or acquire any contract" that must be bid with the government, the AP wrote. Kolaz was paid \$121,116 by the Department of Central Management Services, according to the AP.

The governor's office says Kolaz returned to the private sector for reasons unrelated to the AP story.

OBIT

George Sangmeister

The former Illinois congressman, state legislator and Will County state's attorney died October 7. He was 76.

A U.S. Army veteran of the Korean War, some of his greatest public accomplishments as a congressman, according to his family, include creating the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery in Elwood and bringing a Veterans Affairs outpatient clinic to Joliet. He also had a hand in creating the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie in Wilmington, the first national tallgrass prairie in the country.

Born in Frankfort and a resident of Mokena, he spent more than 30 years in public office. After earning a law degree from John Marshall Law School in Chicago, he served as a justice of the peace and magistrate of the Will County Circuit Court and then four years as state's attorney. He won election to the Illinois House in 1972 and served four years before serving 10 years in the state Senate.

In 1986, he lost a Democratic primary bid for Illinois lieutenant governor. But Sangmeister bounced back and in 1988 won his first of three terms in Congress, where he served until he retired from public office in 1995.

In his private life, he was one of the original partners of the McKeown Law Firm in Joliet and Frankfort, where he befriended Joliet Democratic Sen. A.J. Wilhelmi, who is now a partner. He made an impression on Wilhelmi in 1991, when Wilhelmi was a law clerk at the firm.

"[He] let me know right off the bat, 'You can be a lawyer. You can be a politician. And you can be honest and have integrity and carry yourself with class and dignity.' And he received respect from everyone just by being the decent, honest man that he was."

Wilhelmi says Sangmeister was soft-spoken but willing to state his position on an issue. "He made a comment to me once a long time ago that you always have to remember that you're the servant, and you have to remember who you're serving. Those words, I'll never forget."



George Sangmeister



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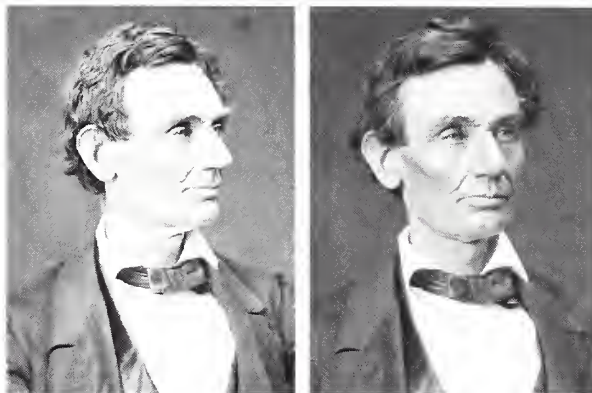
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Alexander Hesler's companion portraits of presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln, taken in Springfield on June 3, 1860, are stunning photographs. Exposed on 8" x 10" light-sensitive glass plates, the images are among the most eloquent and revealing of Illinois' greatest statesman before he left Springfield for Washington.



The Illinois State Historical Society acquired the glass plate positives (the original negatives are in the Smithsonian, damaged beyond repair) and has commissioned archive-quality prints of the Hesler portraits.

In anticipation of the Lincoln Bicentennial in 2009, The Society now offers a limited edition (500) of the 16" x 20" Hesler Lincoln Portraits (shown above), double matted and beautifully framed (choice of natural wood or gilt) with non-glare glass and adorned with a simple brass plate: *A. Lincoln, June 3, 1860*. The photographs are sold only in pairs for \$1,000, plus shipping and applicable sales tax for non-members.

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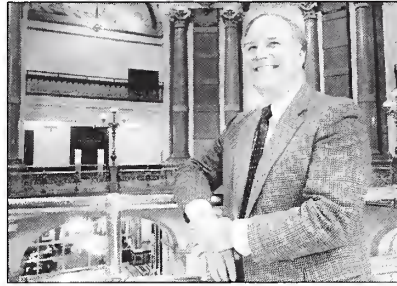
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Charles N. Wheeler III



Trends suggest Illinois faces greater problems than a one-time decline in revenue

by Charles N. Wheeler III

Dark clouds could be on the horizon for state coffers, as the slumping national economy appears to be eroding the upbeat revenue forecasts used to craft this year's state budget. The bad news came in reports last month from state Comptroller Dan Hynes and from the legislature's Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability. The findings include the following:

- The state's cash flow position deteriorated by \$885 million in the first quarter of FY 2008 compared to the similar period a year ago, Hynes noted. The slippage stemmed chiefly from accelerated Medicaid spending and a downturn in sales tax and corporate income tax receipts. Moreover, at the end of September, the comptroller was sitting on almost \$1.4 billion in unpaid bills, roughly \$1 billion more than a year ago.

- In the first four months of the current budget year, general fund receipts were up \$158 million, according to the commission's September briefing. But the gain came from a \$169 million increase in federal receipts; all other sources were off \$11 million. The recent strong performance of the most closely tied economic sources — mainly sales and income taxes — appears to have ended, the commission noted. While personal income tax receipts are likely to grow at a more modest pace, sales tax and corporate income tax receipts "may

Forecasting revenues is as much an art as a science, of course, and in recent years the prognosticators have missed the mark on the low side.

well find growth elusive," the commission said, so "it would not be surprising to see revenues struggle in FY 2008."

Forecasting revenues is as much an art as a science, of course, and in recent years the prognosticators have missed the mark on the low side. Last year, for example, general fund receipts grew almost \$1.3 billion, roughly double the original \$672 million estimate. This budget year's disappointing early results, however, suggest forecasters were too optimistic in projecting \$800 million to \$900 million in growth in the general fund base for FY 2008.

Still, no one expects a repeat of the first years of the decade, when total receipts fell in both FY 2002 and in FY 2003, leaving a \$2.9 billion gap between the estimates used to build the budget those two years and actual collections.

"I don't see any major decline," says J. Fred Giertz, an economist at the University of Illinois' Institute of

Government and Public Affairs. While revenues won't grow as rapidly as in the past few years, a shortfall of several hundred million dollars won't represent "the tipping point" between a sound or unsound budget, he says. "We're so far away from solvency it doesn't make a difference anymore," Giertz notes.

Indeed, the state's checkbook account on June 30 — the end of the budget year — has not had enough money to cover unpaid bills for the past six years, since FY 2001 ended with a \$300 million surplus. Last year's budgetary deficit was \$131 million, which was expected to rise to \$144 million this year, according to initial administration estimates.

Moreover, the state's structural deficit — the gap between what the state's revenue system produces and the costs of maintaining current programs — is now more than \$3 billion and is projected to more than double in the next few years, according to the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, a Chicago-based research and advocacy think tank.

To close the gap, the center argues Illinois should revamp its tax system, increasing income tax rates and broadening the sales tax base, while providing substantial property tax relief and more generous tax credits for middle- and lower-income families.

While an outmoded revenue structure may be part of the problem, the long-term anemic performance of the state

economy also is a major concern, as highlighted in a recent study by the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability.

Titled *A Comparative Study of Illinois' Economy*, the report disclosed some troubling trends:

- From 1997 to 2006, Illinois ranked 43rd among all 50 states in economic growth, averaging 4.5 percent a year, compared to the national mark of 5.5 percent.

- Forty-six other states posted higher rates for job growth than Illinois from 1997 to 2006. While the nation averaged 1.14 percent employment growth during that period, the Prairie State averaged a paltry 0.31 percent.

- The state's unemployment rate topped the national figure in almost three-quarters of the monthly reports over the past decade. On average, Illinois posted a 5.3 percent jobless mark from 1997 to 2006, compared to 4.9 percent for the country as a whole.

- While Illinoisans had the 13th highest per capita personal income in the nation

Moreover, the makeup of the workforce in Illinois is changing in ways likely to place further stress on state finances, according to information from the state Department of Employment Security.

at \$38,215 in 2006, the state ranked only 44th in personal income growth rate over the prior decade, averaging 3.83 percent compared to the U.S. average of 4.19 percent.

Moreover, the makeup of the workforce in Illinois is changing in ways likely to place further stress on state finances, according to information from the state Department of Employment Security.

The state's total nonfarm employment stood at almost 6 million in August, the

state jobs agency reported. That's some 168,000 fewer jobs than in 2002, a 2 percent decline. Perhaps more significantly, the state lost more than 180,000 manufacturing jobs during that period, a 21 percent drop, as well as 97,000 jobs in trade, transportation and utilities, almost an 8 percent dip. At the same time, Illinois gained some 156,000 jobs in education and health, leisure and hospitality, and other services, an 11 percent increase.

Because manufacturing jobs generally pay higher wages with better benefit packages than service industry jobs, the ongoing shift in the employment base is likely to translate into slower growth in income-related revenue sources like the personal income and sales taxes, as well as increased pressure for state-subsidized benefits like health care.

In all, such unsettling trends suggest that Illinois clearly faces greater problems than a one-time revenue slippage. □

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.



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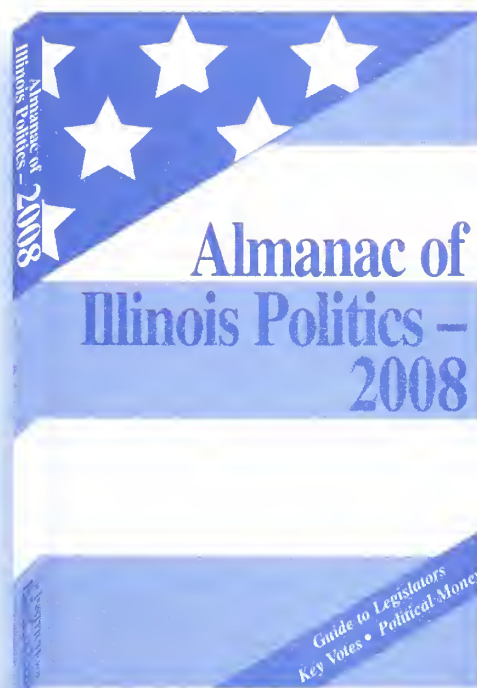
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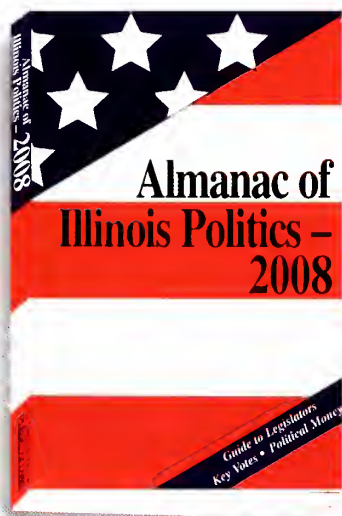
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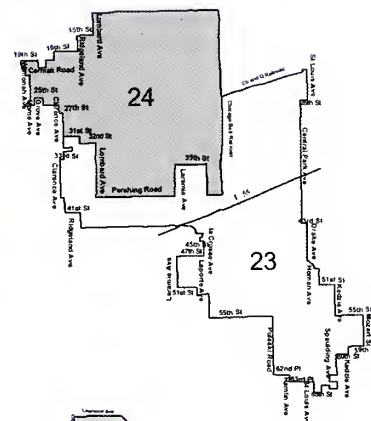
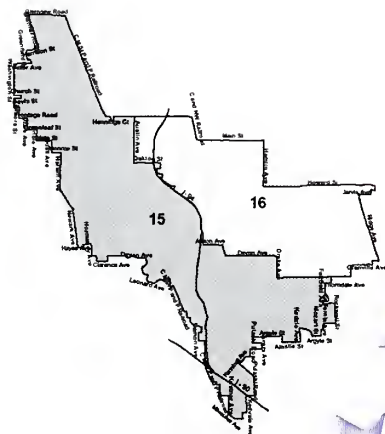


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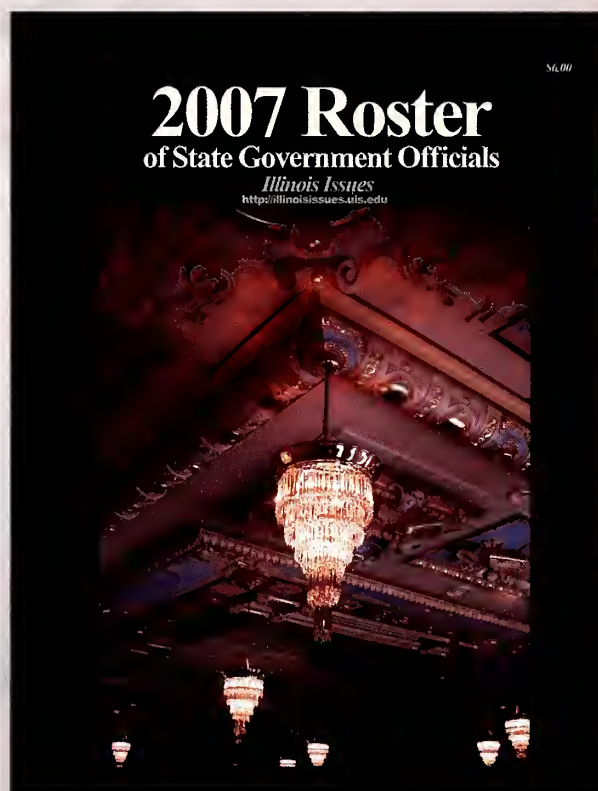
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